Adopting Mustangs

A Christian Perspective

Carol Evaul

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I would like to dedicate this book to my husband, Robert,
Who helped me to adopt the Mustangs.
He has helped me to take care of them,
And been supportive of my love of horses.
I would like to thank God for preserving the Mustangs,
We have so many lessons to learn from them.
Special thanks to my friend, Luna,
For sharing her wisdom about horses,
During our many "horse talks."
To all my other "horse friends,"
Who encouraged me along the way.

Job 39:19-25 **New King James Version (NKJV)**
19 "Have you given the horse strength?
Have you clothed his neck with thunder?[a]
20 Can you frighten him like a locust?
His majestic snorting strikes terror.
21 He paws in the valley, and rejoices in *his* strength;
He gallops into the clash of arms.
22 He mocks at fear, and is not frightened;
Nor does he turn back from the sword.
23 The quiver rattles against him,
The glittering spear and javelin.
24 He devours the distance with fierceness and rage;
Nor does he come to a halt because the trumpet *has* sounded.
25 At *the blast of* the trumpet he says, 'Aha!'
He smells the battle from afar,
The thunder of captains and shouting.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

All of my horse craziness started when I was a young girl growing up near Annapolis, Maryland. My first horse was a 13-14 hands palomino, a Chincoteague Pony from Assateague Island, Virginia. He was the perfect size for me. I named him "Trigger," like Roy Rogers' famous horse. I broke him myself when I was fourteen years old. He was a stallion colt. As he matured, he began terrorizing my neighbors. I caught him knocking over trash cans, eating flowers and chasing the lady next door. Trigger's misbehavior became the reason for me being grounded on many occasions. I obviously did not know much about horses at that time or I certainly would not have chosen a stallion. Since then, I have learned my lesson and I have only had mares because stallions can be rowdy and unpredictable as they mature.

Some people prefer to own geldings rather than mares. To explain a few terms about horses, a gelding is simply a male horse that has been castrated. As a colt matures, he may become more temperamental and aggressive. In my opinion, there is not much point to keeping a stallion unless you are a breeder. There is the extra cost of the procedure to geld a colt and there are some risks of infection, but it is a relatively safe procedure if done by an experienced vet. Timing is important because when it is done, gelding may make a big difference in their behavior. If you wait too long, they are considered to be "cut proud" and you will end up with a gelding that still acts like a stallion, which is not a desirable quality.

Mares offer the option of breeding them if you want, and having a foal later. A mare could have a foal every year. It takes about 340 days or 11 months for a foal to be born. Riding becomes limited toward the end of the pregnancy, but I have ridden my mare up until the day before she foaled without any problems. It was probably not too comfortable for her, but light

riding never hurt. I have always had a preference for mares because of the problems I had with Trigger.

It was a good experience for me to have my own horse as a teenager. I spent all of my time after school with Trigger. He was my wonderful obsession. He was about two months old when I got him; it was easy to work with him. He was really like a big dog. He did not realize that as he grew, he had become much stronger than I was. Before I could ride him, I had to wait until his back could support my weight. He was probably between two and three years old by then. The first time that I sat on his back, he did not even try to buck. I never put a saddle on him because I did not own one. I was able to ride him bareback because he was tame. I used a flat bitted bridle, the cheapest one that I could find. He was confused about what to do when I put the bit in his mouth. He chewed at the bit, but got used to it. He did not understand that I wanted him to go forward. Eventually, he did get the idea of what I wanted him to do. By my insistence, he began turning and stopping by understanding verbal cues and feeling my gentle kicking. He caught on fast and actually became broke to ride quite easily.

I would sneak out many nights and ride Trigger to the river that went through the woods behind my house. My favorite night rides were when there was a full moon. The moon would shine bright at times that I could almost see my shadow. It was thrilling to ride through the woods, passing trees and running through the low brush. My only fear was that my parents would catch me. As it turned out, I was never caught even with those telltale hoof prints that we left behind!

When you pick out your first horse, you feel an attraction much like "love at first sight." It is a special kind of unforgettable emotional experience. I am sure that most horse lovers might even refer it as somewhat "magical." My best memories of growing up were those night rides

with Trigger. I felt freedom to go wherever I wanted. Everyone wants to feel free in some way. Even at my age now, I still enjoy riding horses. I feel the same about riding as I do when I think about my spiritual journey. There is an adventure to be had in the saddle and God gives us a "faith experience" with Him through the paths in our lives. You have to learn to "go along for the ride," and trust God. God wants you to know that He will always take you safely to the end of your life's trail. Riding always provides me with a sense of excitement. I live to ride my horse!

When I start to feel anxious about the things that are going wrong in my life, I try to lean on the Lord like I do when I lean into the saddle. Many riders know that they have to balance themselves and lean with their body to conform to the horse's movements. I "enjoy the ride" because I feel happy in the saddle. I may hold the reins, but any rider knows that the horse also has a will of its own. There is mutuality about the ride because there is a special bond that builds between the horse and rider. God is with us on life's journey. He may take us up some steep slopes and narrow paths. We can be assured of His presence wherever He leads us, but we must learn to lean on Him with total assurance and confidence. We bond closer to God as we go through these faith experiences, knowing that God is always there.

When I ride, I feel that God is with me. Being out in the fresh air and the sound of hooves hitting the ground make me feel more alive. When I took my night rides, Trigger and I would constantly discover new sights together. I really loved to look at the night sky with millions of stars above, what a sight! The greatest aspect about riding is being outdoors. I had a favorite oak tree that was our resting spot on our way to the river. It seemed as if that tree's limbs stretched out like arms reaching all the way up to heaven. I loved that place because it offered me a quieter life. Everyone should have a special place to find God. David, the Psalmist, found a place all

around him in nature and it caused him to respond by praising God. I respond the same way because it is a natural response when you are in awe. You cannot help it!

My favorite book of the Bible is Psalms. Many of the Psalms give references to the amazing beauty of God's creation. God's creation is like His autograph on the world. Nature reveals different characteristics about God. His artistic character can be found in rainbows, sunsets and sunrises because He gives us so many colors to enjoy. There is a variety of plants and animals on the earth that show God's personality. His greatness and humor is constantly exhibited through nature. God reveals Himself through His marvelous universe.

There are strange ways that God helps animals to live. It is funny and odd at the same time how animals use clever tricks to survive. Consider how skunks can spray an awful odor that even other animals dislike it, or think about how opossums play "dead" as a defensive behavior to escape danger. Imagine how a raccoon "wears a mask" like a bandit! Some animals have protective colors to shield them from harm. God has given them all unique ways to stay alive. It is a miracle to think that Mustangs could survive many years alone in the wild. It is hard to understand how that could happen without God helping them.

God made the world for us to enjoy. I enjoy riding horses more than anything else I can think of. I find myself able to think more clearly when I am riding. It is "therapy" for me. The horse is doing the hard work of carrying me. I assume a passive role, enjoying the scenery. I am totally aware that I am being carried. The Bible lets us know that Christ carries our burdens for us. If we are in a relationship with God, then we have peace as a side benefit of keeping our minds fixed on Him. My thoughts always become more sacred when I am riding. I feel more alert and mentally focused. I do my best praying while riding. Some of my best dialogs with God were when I was on the back of a horse. Horses never tell any of your secrets!

When I am riding, I am able to forget my worries. Nothing can bother me when I am in fellowship with my Creator. I can remember riding in Bolivia when I got the news of the death of my favorite uncle and there was no possibility for me to go "home" to the States for the funeral. What else could I do, but ride? It was pouring down rain that day, but I rode to the next village, praying all the way. As I returned, my grief and pain seemed to be washed away in the same way that the rain had washed the dusty road. Everything was freshened by the heavy downpour as I was renewed by God's Spirit pouring down on me. We are told that Jesus will give us rivers of Living Water. I think that we can only appreciate that statement when we are parched and needing a taste of His spiritual refreshment. He promises to quench our thirst! We don't realize how thirsty we can get and how ready He is to provide Living Water.

Why do I feel a greater sense of communion with God on the back of a horse instead of inside of a church building? Why am I not impressed with the material things like the carpets, decor, or the building? Honestly, I don't even see those things. Is there something wrong with me that I experience this feeling of oneness with God that feels so much stronger when I am in the saddle? Being outside permits me to constantly be surrounded by God's world, seeing His greatness and power.

I assume that there must be a lot of people who, like me, find God more readily in nature than between brick walls. Being able to see the sky and stars moves me deeply within. It causes me to consider the One who made this world. A breeze reminds me of how His Spirit moves. I constantly need this kind of experience, to withdraw from people for a while and turn inward to my own thoughts. It brings me a deep sense of joy when I can be alone with God. Jesus withdrew to pray frequently by seeking God through prayer. How many churches encourage people to withdraw from their activities and get alone with God for a while? Trust me when I

tell you that the constant demands of people will wear you out and burn you out. I think that it is necessary and important in our frantic culture today to find a peaceful, quiet place to go. To be spiritually fit, you must have time to meditate alone with God. It is how you renew your spiritual strength. How beautiful it is to be in the presence of the Living God!

After Trigger was sold, even though I love horses, I had to wait many years before I would own another horse again. My husband and I moved to Bolivia, South America, where we worked as missionaries for twenty years. We lived in Santa Cruz, which is a large city, but for about six years, we lived in a small town called Palmar del Oratorio. In Bolivia, most horses are caballos criollos, (the Spanish word for the local variety of mixed breed horses.) There were a lot of horses in Bolivia and excellent cowboys like I have never seen before in my life! It was amazing to watch them ride!

While in Bolivia, my husband bought me a criolla mare named Juanita. She was a beautiful bay horse and came with a young colt. We traded the colt for another horse as he got a little older. In Bolivia, horses are handled a lot because they are used to pull carts, herd cattle or for basic transportation. We had some great horses in Bolivia. At one time we had eight horses. All four of our children had their own horse. I rode almost every day while we lived in Palmar.

We enjoyed riding with our children, who all became excellent riders. We took many night rides to the lagoon. We would race bareback down the sandy roads whenever we had a spare moment. When work teams came from the States to visit, we let them ride our horses. Some of them had never ridden before, so it was a special experience for them. It is amazing to think how our horses made our lives on the mission field seem "normal" in some way during those many years in Bolivia.

After we returned to the States, I came to realize that many people have horses, but they are left in the pasture and not worked with regularly. In the USA, a horse is a "pet", and does not have an actual job. Not many people have the time to spend with their horses because everyone is so busy. It is frustrating for most horse owners to find the time for their horses. So many horses are being sold cheaply at auctions around Illinois because they are green broke or halter trained. This seems so different than in Bolivia, where a horse has a great value.

I had always hoped to try my hand at owning a Mustang. My husband agreed with me that it may be fun. He sensed that I needed something special at this time in my life. Call it a "midlife crisis" if you want, but I needed a change because I was running on empty. After many years on the mission field, I felt burned out and displaced in the USA. Nevertheless, I came back "home" to a place where I did not belong or fit in. We had moved thirty-eight times during our marriage and I was actually afraid of trying to "settle down." Our children were growing up, getting married and leaving us with an "empty nest." I did not have a clear sense of purpose anymore. Everything seemed boring and downhill at this time in my life.

Yet the idea of adopting a Mustang burned some kind of special spark within me. After all of those years serving as a missionary and being focused on others, I was not even sure what I wanted for myself. I realized that those earlier years went by quickly, I never had time to process my losses and feel my grief for the death of my parents and other relatives, not to mention the multiple moves and the many friends that I had to let go of. It was too much letting go, seemingly all of the time. I was getting way too good at this. I think that I had become stale, indifferent and spiritually dull. It was somewhat scary because I felt as if I had lost myself.

Thinking about Mustangs renewed my sense of wonder and feeling a challenge. I guess the horse crazy little girl was still alive inside of me, still obsessed by horses. I felt as if I had

become energized by something that had recaptured my interest and enjoyment once again. How could we adopt a Mustang? Did we need to be horse experts? I wanted to rescue Mustangs, but were they going to rescue me from boredom and mediocrity? How does God restore our souls and bring back joy into our lives? I often felt like a wild Mustang myself running around and doing many activities, programs and working all those frantic years on the mission field. That chapter of our lives and ministry was over and done. Now, I missed my Bolivian friends. I missed Bolivia. Where was "home" anyway? Where did the time go?

I had said too many goodbyes over and over again. I felt as if I were distant from God and everyone else included. How do you keep doing that and still stay balanced and intact? How could God reach me in this stage of my life and in this new home where we now lived called Illinois? How could adopting Mustangs become a way that God would show me about my own restlessness and wandering? Could God use the Mustangs to speak to me and heal some of my hurts and bruises that happened along the way while being in ministry for so many years?

Chapter 2 Adopting Mustangs

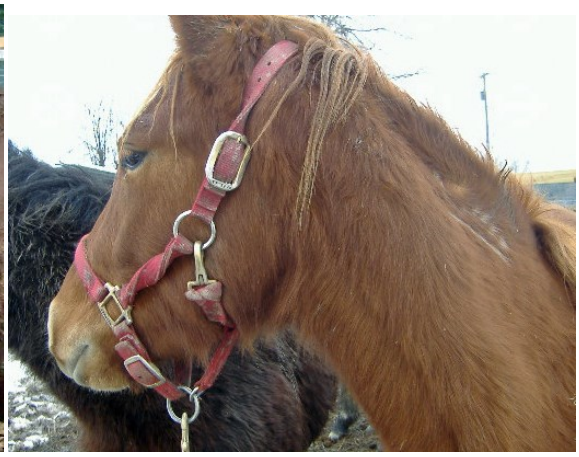
Winter in Southern Illinois can be most unforgiving, especially after living in beautiful tropical Bolivia. My husband, Robert, and I moved to a place with enough land to rescue Mustangs. Now we were planning things with the Mustangs in mind. How he agreed to adopt the Mustangs, well, I am not completely sure. As I had been supportive of his calling in Bolivia, now he was supportive of my interest in the Mustangs. This was healthy for our relationship. It was my turn. I felt more loving toward him because of his "Mustang fever." It was wonderful because he was spoiling me! We found eight-acres with a wooded back pasture. It seemed perfect for our crazy "little project." We built the corral in the harsh November weather with the anticipation of making a safe home for the Mustangs that we would eventually adopt.

I had done research on the internet about adopting Mustangs. We received information from the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management which has a division of Wild Horse and Burro adoptions. According to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the task of managing these wild horses was entrusted to the Department of the Interior. The Bureau of Land Management helps protect and regulate the wild horses and burros. There are some correction facilities that have a rehabilitation program that allows inmates to train Mustangs. There are trained Mustangs available through the prison adoption program listed on the BLM website. We saw that and considered it, but there were none in Illinois.

My husband went to the library and brought home stacks of books about taming or "gentling" wild horses. We had a great time reading about the Mustangs together. It made us closer as a couple. We listened to various audio cassette books about horse handling during supper. It took us weeks to finish them all. Afterwards, we felt somewhat prepared to take on the challenge. Where we live, here in the Midwest, the Bureau of Land Management, or the BLM,

has a field office that covers the Illinois area. It is located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They were helpful by providing information and support. The BLM representative came to visit us in Illinois twice. The government issues a title for each horse after you have taken care of the Mustangs for at least two years. There is a commitment required on your part in order to adopt Mustangs.

Mustangs are healthy because they breed through a natural selection. Mustangs can be any color and various sizes. They have strong hooves, and are resistant to many diseases. They appear to be hyper vigilant, which has been part of their survival, so do not mistake that characteristic for nervousness. Being in a constant state of vigilance is a learned behavior that has protected them from harmful predators. Unfortunately, they include man in the category of a predator. We had to change that image somehow and that would take time.



The "freeze mark" identifies real Mustangs. The hair grows back and turns white.

Mustangs are given a "freeze mark" on their neck which is like a chemical tattoo that identifies the horse when captured. This is clearly visible on the Mustangs' necks because the hair turns white when it grows back. I do not believe that there is a way to remove a freeze mark because it becomes a permanent brand on the horse. It is proof that this is an authentic Mustang that was brought in through the BLM rescue program. The freeze mark can be used to trace their

rescue. Many Mustangs are captured in Nevada, Montana, Wyoming and Oregon. I know that our Mustangs came from Nevada because their paperwork gave us the information about the location of their capture, details about each horse, and a record of shots.

It is interesting that Christians have also been given a mark. The Bible says that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. The seal identifies us as being "in Christ." We can rest in the knowledge that Christ has adopted us into His family. He promises that He will never leave us, never will He forsake us. What a powerful and amazing promise! The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal and our guarantee of having eternal life. We are given the mark as authentication that we belong to His heavenly kingdom. We all have a strong psychological need to belong, and to feel secure. He provides all of these benefits to us freely and eternally through His grace.

Through faith in Jesus Christ and the process of spiritual rebirth, our spiritual eyes become opened. I am constantly learning to see clearer spiritually through the process of continuing growth and understanding of God's Word. I can see God in the miracle of the survival of the Mustangs. I marvel at how God can communicate to us through the world that He created. The universe is a visual exhibit of God's creation. What we see around us is His masterpiece and evidence of His existence. He is still busy creating all of the time. He makes "all things new" whenever a person becomes saved by grace. He is constantly working in our hearts each day of our lives as He calls us to come closer to Him, and to love Him. He never stops calling us to Him. He never gives up on us. We are God's passion, His obsession, and the object of all of His affection.

God has filled the earth with life. God is life. I am awed by the many animals that live on our property. I saw them even before the Mustangs came. There was an abundance of squirrels that tried to cross the front road and sadly, did not make it. Once I saw what I thought was a fat

cat, but it turned out to be a ground hog! He was quite shy and would hide in the drain pipe that went under the road. There were lots of noisy frogs that came out when it rained. There were many moles that caused soft spots in the ground that filled my shoes with extra dirt when I stepped into their mounds. Not to mention lots of flies, beetles, loud crickets, grasshoppers, mosquitoes and bees. There was so much happening outside! I had to be observant to see it!

I am fortunate to have seen all of the robins, blue jays, cardinals, doves, and sparrows in the field. Every now and then we had a few surprise visitors, such as the Canadian geese. We had a pair hanging around for about a week. They seemed to know that they were safe with us. I enjoyed watching them during their brief stay. It started to get a little colder, so they moved on to a warmer place. How does God tell the birds when to fly south? He helps the animals to know when to fly because He preserves them. These things are mysteries of the work of His Spirit.

We have a lot of killdeer here in the Midwest. I almost stepped on a chick out near the barn. Killdeer have brown, white and black feathers. They lay their speckled eggs in unusual places, like out in the open on a gravel road. I found eggs lying on the ground without any visible nesting material. The mother did a strange dance as if she had a broken wing, making a loud distressing cry to keep me away from her eggs. I had never seen that before! At first, I did not know that these were called killdeer, but I became so curious that I did some searching on the Internet so that I would know their name. Illinois seems to have a lot of killdeer. Now I notice them everywhere it seems. My perception has changed radically by spending so much time outside.

Besides finding many birds, I came across many snake skins in the field. Fortunately, I have only encountered one live snake that quickly moved to get away from me! I really do not like snakes. I do like rabbits and in the early summer there are plenty of them. We have to watch

out for baby bunnies before we mow because they can hide well in the grass. I have found various families of field mice. I am not too crazy about mice either! They look strange at birth because they do not have fur and are small. I would find their nests under the water tank when I turned it over to clean it. At first they startled me, but I got used to them and I would put the tank back after it was clean and leave them alone.

We bought six hens so that we would have our own fresh eggs. One night we heard something attacking our chickens. Our vet tried to save one of the injured hens, but she died the next day from the wounds to her neck. There were no signs of entry into the pen, indicating that it probably flew in. Evidently owls are quiet and make no sound when they fly. He told us that the predator was most likely an owl because of the way the chickens were attacked. The feathers were torn and there was a gash in the same spot on the necks of both hens. I treated their wounds with a spray Band-Aid. Two of the hens that were attacked survived miraculously.

If I had not heard the commotion and ran outside, all six of my hens may have been killed in one night. I did have to separate the hurt hens from the other hens because the healthy ones started pecking at the wounds of the injured ones. The injured ones completely recovered afterwards and did not miss a day of laying eggs! We have to be constantly vigilant in order to protect our chickens from predators. Everything out there seems to have some type of predator to watch out for!

I have never seen an owl around our house, but I have seen many hawks. We guessed that maybe it could have been a hawk that got the hens. Hawks are sometimes called "chicken-hawks." I had seen a hawk flying away with a snake in its beak one evening. While they are a threat to my chickens, they have a useful purpose in keeping down the snakes. In order to protect my hens from more attacks, we decided to reinforce the pen with additional chicken wire over

the top. A little discouragement will send them elsewhere to hunt. Prevention is a safe way for everyone to get along in nature. The mesh wire covering the top of the chicken pen worked and solved that problem.

This world is filled with predators, people who will use you, hurt you and wound you. They can sneak in and cause damage. Sometimes the only way to be safe is to put a physical barrier between you and the nasty predator. If I had not heard the hens making noise, I would not have been able to save them in time. In the same manner, we must cry out to God to save us from harm. God is much better at caring for His children than I am with my chickens. When you think about the attributes of God, it helps you to feel safe. God is omnipotent, all knowing, all powerful, eternal, infinite, and holy. God loves us beyond our comprehension. He wants to protect us and care for us. We need to cry out to Him. He will save us. We must believe that He hears our cry like it says in Jeremiah 33:3.

When I was driving to work one day, I saw a small box turtle slowly crossing the road in the other lane. I decided to turn around and "help" the little guy get to the other side. As I turned the car around, I saw another car with several teenagers in front of me who also had seen the turtle, but they swerved intentionally so that they could hit him. I was too late when I got there. The turtle lay in the road convulsing as I approached. I was absolutely stunned at their lack of feeling towards a defenseless little animal. This is a cameo of the world that we live in today, filled with senseless acts of cruelty. Our younger generation is becoming more callous and psychologically hardened. More conscious effort must be made to teach them to have more compassion and empathy towards living things.

There is a natural order, a system of life outdoors that we need to reconnect with to become more balanced as a society. Nature can offer us valuable insights to apply to our lives.

To calm down and "be still" is an important skill for us to learn. If we did that, there would not be so much need for counseling and special medications due to problems with anxiety and depression. Our mental and spiritual health depends on reestablishing our relationship with nature. We can watch the marvelous world outside and develop a greater comprehension of life. How rich it is to watch all of the daily adventures happening outside!

I came to realize that there is a constant battle for survival raging outside my window. We are often unaware that it is happening, even though it is near us. In nature, there are important battles being fought for survival. It is the same in the spiritual world, there are constant spiritual battles within us and around us. We feel the effects of it. Within our hearts we may feel doubts and be troubled by worries. We may have relationships with others that spiral and fall apart and we do not understand why. Divorces and interpersonal conflicts are far too common despite our advances in education. We live in a world filled with great physical pain and traumatic emotional suffering. Even though our standard of living is better now than in all of human history, drug addiction and mental illness are prevalent in our society. We are living in a very sin-sick world. We have serious spiritual problems, and are on a course of destruction.

There are powerful spiritual forces of good and evil at war. There are always casualties when there is a war. Ephesians 6 describes the battle clearly. The eternal conflict can be seen everywhere in the world. There is a constant lack of peace and threats of war between different nations. Sinners are natural enemies of God. The Bible urges us to be reconciled with God through Christ. We are caught in a battle between light and darkness. We must believe that we have a dynamic role to change things in our world. We were meant to impact everything around us. Christians should be agents of spiritual change wherever they are. We have the power of the message of how to have peace with God. We may not be able to change the whole world, but we

do have a small place in it. We can make an impact where we are by being faithful and conscientious in the little things.

During a bad thunder storm, I watched a vicious fight between a blue jay and a robin. I had discovered a robin's nest with several eggs in my barn. Blue jays can attack and sometimes eat robin's eggs. I was stuck in the barn because of the lightning, so I witnessed an absolutely horrific fight between the two birds. The aggressive blue jay had devastated the robin's nest, knocking all of the eggs and the nest on the ground. Only one egg was left unbroken. I replaced the nest and the egg carefully. I wondered if the mother would return to it. To my surprise, the robin did return, and "Victor" eventually hatched. He was gone in a couple of weeks and the nest that they fought over fearlessly was left empty. The blue jay did not like me coming around the nest. I don't know where the blue jay went afterwards, but he did not come back to terrorize us again. Who knows if I changed things by being there? I believe that I made a difference by my presence in the barn. I was involved in the battle also, obviously, helping the robin.

I was impressed by the way these birds struggled to survive. I never knew that so much was going on in my barn until then. We are reminded that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God's complete knowledge. God is fully aware of all of our circumstances. We know that we are more valuable to Him than sparrows, so we should be encouraged by understanding that God cares about our all of our troubles. Imagine how He watches over us and protects us. It is so wonderful that we can never fully understand the mercy and grace of God. He gives us rest, protects us while we sleep, provides us food and keeps us healthy until He calls us home to heaven. Our life is totally in His hands, every breath and heartbeat is a gift from Him.

In exchange for all of God's goodness, He is disrespected and His creation is being ruined. It is a great tragedy to see how man destroys the earth, kills human life through abortion,

and throws away natural resources. It seems like the only thing man creates is waste. Is the way that men treat the earth and others symbolic of their attitude toward God? After all, if I view myself as part of His creation and God is the Creator, I should respect this world as His and others who are created in God's image. If we reject a belief in God, we can do whatever we want without any accountability to Him. Being accountable means becoming actively involved in building up, saving and restoring what we have. Mustangs are part of God's creation. The Mustangs are worth saving. My husband and I adopted them as a partnership with God to try to save them. I wanted to explain my feelings in this book about Mustangs and their intrinsic value. We need to preserve them for our grandchildren to enjoy. Adopting Mustangs is a spiritual pursuit that honors God because they belong to Him.

The word "Mustang" comes from Spanish and means wild, without an owner or stray. There are varieties of the original Spanish word such as: mesteño, mesteco, and the more contemporary mestengo from which we get the word Mustang. Another word for Mustang is the Americanized term, "Bronco." You can find a lot of varieties of words and meanings that make it rather difficult to get an exact name. I was confused as I read about them, aside from knowing that they came from fine Spanish bred horses that may have been Arabian or Andalusian. In many ways they are a mystery because much is missing about their background. They had to rely on their instincts and their own will to live as feral horses.

Due to the expanding herds the Mustangs must be adopted. There are some fees involved, but they are minimal. You have to fill out an application to adopt and be approved. The BLM gives clear specifications on the type of corral you must provide. They make it easy for you to follow. The Mustangs need a secure enclosed pen and high fences. The BLM helped us through the preparation process by providing information and support. They have many websites to

explain who can adopt, how to adopt and the requirements: http://www.blm.gov/ is an example. You can Google "adopt Mustangs" and you will find many links to help you.

These amazing horses are God's creation. Their story of survival is inspiring. Today in our society we see people struggle with depression and wanting to give up because of difficulties. The Mustangs have faced bitter cold, struggled to find food and shelter in the wild, and yet they still made every effort to live. We can learn from them how to survive by developing more courage. They had to depend on God for all of their needs. Why can't we also depend on God for our needs? With the economy and lack of jobs we are facing now in the USA it can seem frightening, but consider the Mustangs. They are a living testimony of His grace and ability to care for them. God can care for us the same way as He has for those wild horses.

The Mustangs survived mostly by adaption to the wild. The downside to that is that their methods to survive work best in the wild. When they have to shift to a domestic environment, they don't adjust very readily. This is similar to our lives, we may be well adapted to living in our secular culture, but later find ourselves ill equipped to live the Christian life. We have to accept the will of God and His ownership of our lives. We must allow ourselves to trust Him and be broken under His love. Quite a process!

The greatest challenge that we face today is not economic, political or social. Our greatest challenge in life is spiritual. The question remains over whether we will trust God in our circumstances and do the right thing. The first step of human development revolves around the issue of mistrust or trust. Do you trust God to provide for your financial needs? Can God take care of your health? Can God give you peace and give you a good night's sleep? We must give all of our worries to Him. He is able to give us our needs day by day. Like the Mustangs, God can take care of us no matter what happens to the economy, in politics, or in the world.

It is never a mistake to trust God. When you allow yourself to do things that are beyond your own control, taking risks and crossing new frontiers with God at your side, you will not be disappointed. Perhaps adopting Mustangs seems like a crazy idea, but the opportunity for learning to trust God was so great for us in this exercise of faith, that it was worth it many times over. Too many Christians live mediocre lives, too safe, too comfortable, and very boring. We need to move toward the edge and feel God's pleasure as we start to enjoy life.

We were missionaries for twenty years through many uncertain situations. At times I must admit that I miss that thrill of "living by faith," which was more of an everyday thing in Bolivia. We never knew what a day would bring there. We had many strikes, political demonstrations, road blocks, curfews and felt the stress of an unstable political situation that was common to us while we lived there. With the recent shifting political and economic stresses that we find in the United States recently, we are going to have new opportunities to learn to walk by faith here also. Once again, we must develop complete reliance on God alone, instead of the government or even ourselves. It is not a bad thing to depend on God. It is spiritually healthy and right to rely totally on Him. How about trusting God right now with something that is tearing at your heart, my friend? Consider the many opportunities to turn things over to Him and allow Him to help you right where you are. We can only find our security in Him, everything else is an illusion. He is the Rock of Ages, our Refuge and so many other wonderful names for Him as found in the Bible.

Chapter 3 Three Mares

Robert and I went to the rescue holding pen near Springfield, Illinois, to pick out the Mustangs that we wanted to adopt. While there were many to choose from, we selected our three mares because of their different colors. I was certainly in horse heaven! There were some stallions, but we had decided beforehand that we would only take mares. The Mustangs looked a little scraggly because they were in a pen with a lot of other horses. I am sure that not too many people get horses in the dead of winter. But it is how the timing worked out for us. We made arrangements to bring them to our house. It was exciting to anticipate their arrival!

Three pretty mares, Nelly, Misty and Negra.

We named the mares: Negra, (a Spanish word for black because she was mostly black), Nelly, (a solid red sorrel) and Misty, (a brown bay with a star.) These mares would come to live with us for three years. Unfortunately, they were already close to a year old, which was a little late for beginning training. They looked underdeveloped because they had been weaned early and they looked less muscular when compared to Quarter Horses.

It was a very cold day when we brought them in a stock trailer and loosed them into our corral. They ran back and forth in the corral getting to know their new home. Their ears stood upright as they were snorting from fear. The whites of their eyes glared as they stretched them wide while watching us. Before long, they settled down because we had provided fresh water, sweet feed, a mineral salt block, and a huge round bale of good quality hay. They were frightened and confused, huddling together. Negra was the first one to dare to come close to us. She could not resist checking us out. It was thrilling to be near them, we did not know what they would do! I had my camera ready to take their pictures.

Negra was my husband's horse from the start. Negra had picked my husband out. It was Negra that chose him, not the other way around. She always was more attentive to him than to me. She had a sweet temperament. Negra was black and brown. She had brown around her nose and ears. Her mane and tail were black. She had a rugged star on her forehead that looked as if it were partially rubbed off. She was better socialized than the others. Negra was not very jumpy or nervous. She was unusually calm most of the time. Negra was the dominant mare because she was the herd leader. She was a little larger than the other two. She got to eat first and when she went into the barn, they followed as she called the shots. Negra never put her ears back. She did not know how to be led with a rope. She would constantly go ahead of me at first. She did learn rather quickly after a short time spent in the round pen. Actually she was quite smart.

Negra coming up close to me. Misty is in the back, they were usually close together.

Negra was more food motivated than the other two mares. Negra was always hungry. She really did "eat like a horse." She would accept treats readily. She became quite the little beggar. She tamed down first because of her shameless hunger. She was not the prettiest horse, but had a beautiful personality. Negra tolerated me, but her heart belonged to my husband. I enjoyed how my husband became her "preferred person." He was surprised by her obsession with him. She would watch the house for him to come out and run up to the gate to get his attention. She was by his side every chance that she had, the little flirt. There must be some sort of chemistry that drew her in that way. They can read people and they develop their own likes and dislikes toward them. Their instincts are usually correct. Maybe that is where they get the term "animal magnetism," but at any rate, there was something happening that was very special. We do have a relationship with animals that makes our lives happier and healthier. God designed it that way. Animals reduce our stress, stabilize blood pressure and provide us comfort and enjoyment.

Negra loved to eat!

Negra constantly "blocked" me from Misty. Misty was usually aggressive.

Negra looked better as she filled out!

Negra stomps the ground, sometimes she got impatient for treats.

Nelly was a gorgeous little sorrel and she knew it.

Nelly was a sweet little sorrel, and she was unbelievably curious. She could open the gate with her mouth and was far too clever for a horse. One day when they all had escaped from the pen, we realized that it was Nelly who had learned to open the latch. She could take the top off of a trash can. She stole my jacket from a hook. She knocked my transistor radio into a mud puddle. She was a tease. She was fearless when she wanted something. She had no markings on her, a solid red clay color. She filled out by her second year, so much that she looked like a totally different horse. She had a funny personality. She would lift her lips up and show her teeth as if she were mocking me. I am not sure what that was all about. Nelly was our "clown." Nelly stuck closer to me. She did not mind me touching her. She was not as food motivated as Negra. I thought that she liked attention more than anything. She was definitely the smartest of the three.

At first, Nelly was a wood biter and chomped the wood planks in the corral. This is called "cribbing." I discovered that if I put on rubber gloves and smeared the planks with horse manure, she would stop biting the wood. I never saw her go back to that bad habit again. Using

the manure is safe because it is natural, even though it is perhaps not the most appealing solution, it did work! There was always something happening out in that corral!

Nelly would show her teeth and do a clacking noise. Not sure what she was doing here!

She was the most fun because she was very playful and unpredictable!

Our Mustangs did have another strange habit that I did not like. They had a tendency to try to suck your fingers when you fed them grain or treats from your hands. They were still in the "oral stage." They did not get to nurse like domesticated horses. It was weird at first to have them latch onto my fingers, so I usually pulled back. I gave them grain in a bowl. When I gave them treats, I would hold them out so they could not get fixated on my fingers. The Mustangs have some unfinished business from their days as foals. Their developmental process was interrupted significantly, which presents some unusual quirks in their behavior.

Misty by far had the prettiest color of the three. She was a "classic bay mare with a near perfect star." Misty was our little "survivor." She had an injured front leg. She was kicked by another horse when she was being transported to the Illinois holding farm. She was still favoring that leg when she arrived. She was so neurotic about being touched. The injury healed by itself because I could not get close enough to her to even spray it. She could not get over it. Actually, it was surface deep, a tear in the outer hide, but to her it was if it were still an open wound. She was so fearful!

Misty was certainly a beautiful Mustang!

Misty was the wildest of the three. You can see the scar on her upper right leg.

Misty looking so sweet and innocent. You can almost see a halo.

Misty had a scar on her leg that healed, but she never healed emotionally from her injury. There are people like that as well, they have been hurt somehow and they still neurotically hold on to their pain. They will not trust another person because they are sure it will cause pain. I wish that I knew the secret to moving Misty beyond that stuck stage. I wish that she could have realized that the outside of her leg had been healed. Misty had to forgive who hurt her. She needed to get over what happened and try to forget the past. Poor Misty was stuck in the dead zone of no improvement.

Misty was a "problem horse" due to the leg injury. She was more detached, usually standing with her back to me. She was stubborn and a fighter. She did not want her halter on and without it I could not restraint her. If I could not restrain her, then I could not handle her. She caused me the greatest frustration of all. She was so hypervigilant that I even tried an herbal paste that I bought and put in her feed to calm her, but it did not work. Nothing worked on Misty. Poor Misty was so afraid! I could not force myself on her, she would not allow it.

People have fears also, it goes both ways. They may not trust Mustangs because they are afraid of being injured. When I reflect on it now, they never bit or kicked me during those three years! Horses are not complicated, they are simple. They are fair minded. Horses are honest and show what they feel, when they feel it. I would constantly talk to the Mustangs when I was with them. I would tell them what I was going to do. I would whistle and call them. If you are gentle with them, they will respond the same to you.

Mustangs are born with a strong sense of territory. I was aware of that each time when I was in the corral. I knew that I had invaded their space and had to be careful not to be seen as a threat. It is wise not to make sudden movements, not to be too noisy and not to corner them. Misty had the strongest fight response. She would stomp the ground at me and snort if I got too

close to her. She would warn me to back off. When you have Mustangs, you had better understand how to respect their space. "Territory" is similar to psychological boundaries, the important lesson to learn is when to back off. Stepping back will ease the tension and create the space available for the Mustangs to move. You always need to use common sense when around them.

Mustangs show aggressive behaviors to each other by kicking and biting. When they act out, it could be that they feel threatened, or are defending their space. I only had a few instances when I thought I might be kicked, so I moved away when I thought they could reach me and made sure a fence was between me and their back legs. They were well aware of the barriers and know better than kicking a wooden fence or a metal gate. You never walk directly behind them or rush up to them for your own safety.

Mustangs will follow you once that they trust you. They begin to demonstrate "herd behavior." It is called "joining up," which is not exactly submission, but more like showing you acceptance into their herd. Ideally, this is what you want to happen, but it takes time. Mustangs have great memories, they remember the pleasant experiences. If you make a mistake, it is not the end of the world. They tend to be forgiving creatures, so you could get another chance if you approach them carefully. It may take them some time to trust you again.

The Mustangs became more enjoyable when we began to have fun with them. I would play "soccer" with them. I kicked the ball in the corral and they would run to one side to avoid it. This was a desensitizing activity, and before long it did not intimidate them at all. They would run around and accidently kick the ball as if it was in their way. I tied strips of trash bags along the inside of the corral to "scare" them. This helped to get them used to things that move. I tied helium balloons along the side to change objects. I bought one of those noodles that are used to

play in a pool. I would touch them all over with the noodle. They would jump away from it. I forgot my noodle one day when it started raining, when I came back there were bite marks all over it. They had destroyed the "evil" noodle! It was as if every day were an adventure with our Mustangs!

I began writing a journal about the Mustangs the first week that they arrived. I was not sure why I was doing that at the time. Maybe I had expected a great story to surface about my ability to tame them. At some point, I began to see another story emerge. It became like a devotional for me. I did not want to forget Victor, or the killdeer or the constant safety in the corral. Adopting Mustangs was the desire of my heart. It gave me a different kind of intimate experience of building my faith in God. I wanted to hold on to that.

We had a horribly cold Illinois winter the first year. I could not stand the awful ice storms. I actually wondered if the Mustangs would freeze outside. Their coats became heavy. They would use their hooves to break the ice in the water tank. Later, I did have to buy a heater for the water tank. We had some strange combinations of snow and freezing rain. I ran low on hay that year. Everyone had problems getting enough hay. When it gets extremely cold, animals have to eat more to keep themselves warm. But God always helped me to find hay.

After the cold passed, there were thunder storms with the threat of tornados, powerful winds and heavy rain. There are many obstacles to keep you from being able to work outside with the Mustangs. Spring arrived with warmer weather allowing me to sit on the top board of the corral. I would take out my chair and my iced tea so that I could sit in the center of the corral and read my Bible. They were always hyper vigilant. They would watch me leave in my car. They knew the very minute that I came back. They would all stand at the gate facing the house. They recognized my car as I drove into the driveway. I do believe that they were that smart!

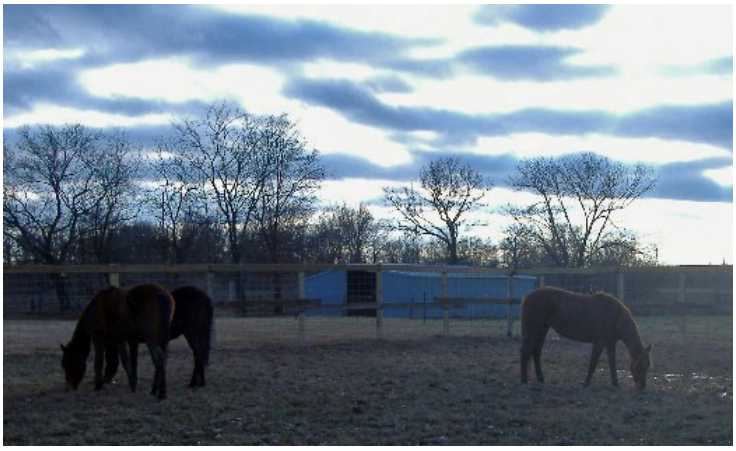
Every spring as it gets warm, they shed their winter coats. I brushed them to help the extra hair come off. Usually, their shedding leaves large patches of hair on the ground. Later, as I was drinking my coffee, I noticed that birds were carrying the horse hair away for their nests. By the afternoon, I could not find any of the horse hair; the birds had taken it all! God has designed an amazing system of life around us. If only we were more aware of it! Each day is filled with everyday miracles. In spite of my worries and stress, an hour with the Mustangs relaxed me. It was a sweet escape to enjoy their beauty. How I enjoyed a few precious minutes with them!

When I am with my horses, I am no longer a prisoner of the telephone, trapped for hours on the computer, in my office or driving my car. I am able to see the world in living color. My horses are a big part of that world. I can connect to God through them. Many "horse people" have the same feeling. The Mustangs forced me outdoors by motivating me to be with them. I would not have bothered if not for them being there. They became familiar with me constantly taking pictures of them.

Negra smelling the camera, Nelly looks on. They got used to the camera.

There are many things to do while outside besides working with the horses. Each year, I try to have a nice small garden. It does not take that much time to plant my 30 X 30 raised plot. I have enjoyed living in a place where I have land. I like to watch the setting sun especially as all of the colors of the sky seem to change in a moment. I remember how I enjoyed those special

days. I can always worship God on a day like that! How great is God, beyond our imagination! How beautiful is the world that He created! Glory to God!



Beautiful sky at sunset, everyday there is a new one in the Midwest!

When was the last time that you watched a sunset? When have you been aware of what is happening outside of your window? Have you been able to pray uninterrupted and had some time of silence? Have you ever thanked God for His creation? As you look around, imagine who He is. God likes order, color and variety. God is an artist. He paints the sky each evening and rolls out the stars each night. He does all of this for us to enjoy. God wants us to enjoy our lives through Him.

Why don't you stop and go outside and thank God for this marvelous world He has made for us. Can you imagine the place in heaven that He is preparing for us? Heaven is a real place, like Bolivia, and like Illinois, but even better because there is no sin there. God will live with us and walk with us. We will be totally free of sin, something we cannot imagine. It makes me excited to think of going "home" to heaven. This world gives us a glimpse of what may be coming, and it is all good! The best part will be meeting Jesus face to face and then that great reunion with our loved ones. Oh what a great day that will be!

Chapter 4 Feral Horses

The word "feral" is another word for wild, or undomesticated. There are records that Spanish ships wrecked off the Atlantic coast and left behind what is now called the Chincoteague Ponies. There are other types of feral horses, such as the Bankers, Nokotas, but probably the most well-known are the Mustangs. These feral horses demonstrate the power of adaptation that enabled them to survive. There must have been divine intervention. They are a living testimony of God's mercy upon His creation. It is a miracle that they are still here!

Who does take care of these wild horses ultimately? The Bible says that God feeds the birds. He must feed the wild horses also. God has protected these animals, providing for them and giving them the ability to survive. As these horses adapted in different environments, they emerged into a new breed. Nature is like an open book to teach us about life. Sometimes I think about my own life, how God took care of our family on the mission field. There were all kinds of snakes, tropical diseases and dangerous conditions, but God kept us safe. There is no other explanation for our survival on the field and their survival in the wild, except that God is powerful. Of course, living on the mission field is another story in itself.

I thought that I knew a lot about horses before I had Mustangs. But the Mustangs reduced me to zero. I had to start all over again and learn the basics. I was frustrated and curious at the same time. I found it to be a very humbling experience. I had to forget about my own abilities and ask God to help me to know what to do each day. It was a good experience because I did learn new lessons about feral horses. Mustangs have an unbroken spirit. They have to be conquered. They need to be won over through their own free will. They will submit when they trust you. Trust is actually another word for love. They need to fall in love with you in order to be tamed by you. Many of these Mustangs have traumatic memories of their interactions with

people because of the way they are captured. They see you as a predator, which brings up their fear instincts and responses of fight or flight.

Mustangs are untamed, and for years have roamed open lands protected and owned by the government. They had no human contact at birth and later were captured and held in pens. The lack of interaction and socialization results in their anxiety when you are trying to work with them. Some people could view these horses as a nuisance. Horse breeders may see them as a threat to the horse breeding industry. Other people believe that the Mustangs should be slaughtered because the herds are growing. It costs a lot to maintain them and the vast land where they live is desirable for other purposes. It may seem that Mustangs do not have many redeeming qualities, aside from being a symbol of the past, but they do offer a rare opportunity for a new level of horsemanship. Mustangs do have some positive qualities. Mustangs have developed into a stronger breed of horse, free of diseases and easy keepers.

They would eat anything, including leaves!

A Mustang's body language provides strong clues as to how they are feeling. They may turn their bodies away from you. If there is more than one, they build a shield with their body to block you from the weakest animal. Mustangs have a "herd mentality" because they work

together for survival and companionship. They communicate to each other by moving toward you or away, so pay attention to what they are doing.

What do you see in their body language? They liked to hide behind each other.

Many of us have a restlessness that we cannot seem to understand. I have seen this trait in our Mustangs. Perhaps it is the basic insecurity that both men and animals share. The world is filled with danger and fear because of sin. We are all sojourners here. Everything that we see is temporal. Everything has suffered under the effects of sin. All creation is waiting for Christ to return, to heal the world from the curse of sin. The void that we feel is the result of our spiritual incompleteness. Our minds are affected by sin and our behavior reveals the true intentions of our hearts.

The feral mindset is not reserved just for Mustangs. Can you see yourself in the Mustangs? We all have stubborn streaks that need to be "broken" under the Master's gentle hand. God deals with each person differently by using approaches according to our needs, personality, desires and uniqueness. Some people are broken by pain and submit through

surrendering after a long exhausting fight. Others run through many fences trying to escape the Lord, not wanting to be constrained by His laws and will of the Master. God has ways of "corralling" us to do His will. Hopefully, the breaking process will make us more useful to Him.

To view God as the "Master" offends us, because we see ourselves as actualized, psychoanalyzed, rich, independent, and well-adjusted. We have been given secularized formal education, volumes of information and more entertainment than we could ever process in a lifetime. The word "Master" also means "Lord." Do we see God as our Lord and Master? When was the last time that you thought of God as your Lord, the Master of your life, your plans, and submitted to His will? Have you been obedient to His leading?

We are self-sufficient, autonomous, economically prosperous and self-absorbed. Much like those Mustangs that first arrived on our property, they rejected our efforts to get close to them. We treat our Creator God as if we do not need Him. We are wild natured and unaware of our actual condition. We do not depend on God. We do not fear Him. We run from Him and prefer to be on our own because we have no sense of the beauty of the Master's loving care for us. We hide from God because we do not want to change. We escape from His presence through work, addictions, idolatry, and other traps that keep us stuck, alone and running scared.

God wants to capture our will. He wants us to enjoy His green pastures. The twenty-third Psalm describes the care given by the Lord who is our "Shepherd." We lack nothing because He is everything. He gives our souls rest. He takes away our spiritual thirst. He guards and protects us. The Lord loves us by laying down His life for us. Yet we still cling to our old style of living because we do not trust Him. We need the Lord. We were made to have fellowship with God. There is a void in each one of us for God that will become filled with carnality if we do not fill it with His Spirit. People who run away from God run into chaos and confusion.

Most horse handlers know that the sweet spot for the horse is near the master. The relationship between the two is based on love. I have loved my horses as if they were human. I enjoyed the time spent with them. God loves to be with us daily in a personal way. He absolutely delights in us. He is committed to caring for us. He is consumed by His love for us, and toward us. We are His beautiful masterpiece and the object of His intense love.

We can submit to God through a step by step process or simply because we have nowhere else to turn. A round pen is an amazing tool to work with horses. I think that I have been put in God's round pen on different occasions. I went in circles and I thought I was getting somewhere, but I was going around. Many people are running in circles in round pens that they have created for themselves. They have not figured out that by turning toward God, they will receive the rest that they have been searching for all along.

We do not have total control over our lives because God has the reins. God has many strategies to work us into His corner. Thinking that we have control is an illusion. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we can control our own destiny. God is the sovereign King of the Universe of all that is seen and unseen. Once we understand that the Master is more powerful than we are, we learn our place.

I like to use the round pen because it is a place for working one on one with your horse. After the horse gets tired from running, I invite the horse to come towards me. I know when I have her full attention because she will face me and move toward me in the center of the round pen. The Mustangs hated the round pen. The Mustangs gave me a constant picture of myself, how I resist submitting to God because of my insecurities and false ideas. How I identify with them. Christ wants to draw us to himself. He wants us to walk closer toward Him. We are only one turn away from making a change in God's round pen.

They felt safe by constantly pacing back and forth.

In "God's corral," He works our faith out in the same manner. Often a horse handler will push the limits with the horse and create a crisis that forces the horse to make a choice. We are creatures of habit and repeat our old mistakes, returning to the same "stuck" spots over and over again. The horse will continue running around until they become tired and the battle of wills is over. There is a lot of hard work done in the corral. He wants to take away our bad habits, negative thoughts and teach us to obey Him. God is active in our spiritual growth. He did not adopt us to keep us locked up in a pen. God has a purpose for our lives. The greatest purpose is to know Him and be in His presence!

"Lunging" is a good way to exercise a horse. The horse runs around you while you hold a "lunge line" or a rope. It is a good way to teach verbal commands. It gives the horse a chance to stretch his legs. Our faith needs to grow legs. We need to stretch and exercise our faith to find wider and higher places to trust God. We need to have our lunge line to God. Faith was never meant to be a onetime practice. There should be a continuous exercising of our faith building and making it stronger, so it will be beneficial to us and others. While God lunges us, we learn to obey His voice as it says in John 10:27. We know His voice and we follow Him.

Negra's ears move indicating that she is listening to me.

When a horse is lunging, you can see the ear of the horse turn as they move forward, listening to your voice. In order to train your horse, you should stand in the center to guide the horse around. God's voice gently leads us when we are being worked with. He speaks to us as we move. We need to be prayerful, but we also need to learn to listen more. God speaks in our lives through His Word, spiritual people, our families, our friends, and if need be, He may use dreams. He may use word pictures, floods, rainbows, a burning bush, a talking donkey, writing on a wall, a big fish, a dove, a snake or anything else that He pleases to use. He always communicates to us. We will know His voice because our ears will turn so that we can listen to His voice.

All of our horses had different personalities. You can discover a horse's personality quickly by their behavior. They can be passive, aggressive, nervously high strung, food motivated, mean, fearful, loving, or curious. Some horses are introverts and some are extroverts. Just like you may know some people that are crazy, I believe that there are horses that are crazy. There are horses that are dangerous to be around. Know your limits because they can and will

hurt you. Regardless of their personality, there are real risks involved when dealing with horses. Accidents happen because we are not careful or they get frightened. You have to develop some safety measures when working with them. You must learn how to conduct yourself as you walk around them. Slowly come up to them and never walk directly behind them.

The intelligence of a horse is important. Horses are smart. One of my friends would say, "Horses is smart and people is dumb." Some people suffer from making poor decisions and do not know when to "come in out of the rain." Still, it is a shame that some people have not developed plain old horse sense. They make emotional decisions and end up as if they were running right into a barbed wire fence. Perhaps horses can be considered smarter than people because at least they are able to sense danger. They learn from their mistakes by trying to avoid pain through situations that seem similar. They remember the pain. If we fail to ask for help, do not seek answers and make a mess of our lives, it may appear that horses really are smarter than people. Horses learn from their mistakes. I wish I could say the same for people.

Those people need a change up in their lives. When does a horse do a "change-up" and what is it? A "change-up" is when a horse turns to a different direction at the cue of the handler. It is when the horse learns to listen to the cues. Change-up is like repentance, it means turning around. When we have not listened to God's cues, He makes us "change-up" by allowing adversity, obstacles, suffering, pain and trials into our lives. We often resist His way of working with us. He is gently teaching us valuable lessons by training us to obey Him. He is preparing us for endurance races in the future, getting us ready under His steady guide for greater challenges and longer races. We can rely on His guidance to make our change-ups at the right times.

Most of us will eventually learn from our mistakes if we make enough of them. A horse learns through trial and error and by repetition. If they get shocked enough times from a hot

fence line, usually they will avoid it, even when it is turned off. We all know people who repeatedly fall into the same patterns of behavior over and over. They repeat the same bad choices, but they expect different results. It is frustrating trying to help people to make life changes when they do not learn from the past. They must process information about what they are doing using better judgment and choose to go in another direction to avoid living in constant conflict and pain. Why do some people seem to enjoy pain? There are all kinds of strange addictions. I think it is what they are used to, and though unnatural, it is the only feeling they have left. Maybe the pain makes them feel more alive. Perhaps it is the only deep feeling left after becoming so emotionally numb. They must first change their thinking and then stop repeating the destructive behaviors. There is a much better way to live through Christ.

I was a counselor and I understand that change is uncomfortable. People may think that turning to God for help is only for someone who is weak. We are afraid to do what God wants because we think it will be terrible. We have twisted ideas about God. We cannot imagine how our lives could be if we were more devoted to God. We try to carry our own burdens in our own chaotic way, rather than submit to Him. We often think that we are able to live without God, not depend on Him and figure out our own fixes to our problems.

Our logic is messed up. It does not matter how you grew up, who your parents were or how much education you have. It doesn't even matter if you are a pastor or a missionary. You can still kick back at God's calling on your life. Jonah is a good example of a "Mustang Prophet." Jonah wanted to go the "other way." Our goals need to line up with God's goals to advance His work. If God's people don't get involved doing God's work, who will? Yet there are many resistant Christians who still have not submitted to God's will. Like the Mustangs, they are not gentled to His will. They are in the corral, but still as wild as can be.

Our spiritual eyes are blind when we are spiritually dead. We have a great need to be restored, revived and renewed. We have physical life, but we are missing the capacity for seeing things God's way. God's ways are different than ours and amazingly, almost the opposite at times. In God's economy: to die is gain, to be rich, you must become poor, to win, you must lose and to live, you must die to self. We do not think like this naturally. We have a carnal nature that tries to control all of our thoughts and actions. It is that carnal nature that loves sin and does not want to submit to God. The carnal nature must be tamed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I had heard a lot of teaching about spiritual transformation for most of my life, I did not understand it until much later. I am sure that God does not want this message of hope to be hidden from us, but our spiritual blindness blocks us from becoming fully alive in Christ. I used to think that I would go to heaven one day, but until then I was stuck here, biding my "earth time." I had to get that "church thing" out of the way on Sunday, but the rest of the time was really mine. How backwards! Perhaps my poor understanding was caused from spiritual ignorance. I was like an illiterate person when it came to the Bible. I did not know that I needed to mature in my faith. I thought that I needed to rejoice that I had been "saved", which really should be quite enough. I knew something was missing because I certainly did not want to live as a "baby Christian" all of my life. I did not know what to do, like so many other nominal Christians.

We cannot change ourselves by ourselves. It is not a matter of positive thinking, learning the right steps, having a magic formula or doing good works. We need to desire to change before we can change. The Holy Spirit draws us and calls us "to come to Him." By faith we are spiritually reborn in Jesus Christ, by believing in His act of redemption on the cross. The rebirth is a mystery for us because while our hearts become transformed internally, we still look quite

the same externally. The dead carnal heart is replaced with God's heart. When we receive God's heart, we are given God's nature. He gives us a new conscience through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit assures us of the presence of God within. Many Christians are missing His power in their lives. The only way to truly live the Christian life is through the power of the Holy Spirit, not by self-effort, seminars, degrees, ministry titles, family ties or anything else.

We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth and transform our minds. He teaches us through the Word and in everyday life's circumstances. He cannot stop teaching us because He uses every minute of our lives as teachable moments. He shows us new ways of understanding Him. As we ask Him to help us and allow Him to instruct us, our faith grows. The normal outcome of growing in our faith is through Christian service to others. In order for our faith to be alive we need use it in some kind of Christian ministry. We can't help but go in that direction. It pleases Him to work through us and help us live fully.

I am not a theologian, nor would I want to be. I am sharing simple concepts about my faith. I am not a perfect person. I am still growing and becoming transformed spiritually. We cannot know God without having a spiritual connection to Him. Even though my Mustangs lived on my property, ate my grain and were watched over and cared for by me, they did not know me at first. I had chosen them to come to my corral. With time the Mustangs came to understand who I was and to recognize what I did for them. It is sad that we do not recognize all of the wonderful grace and mercy that God has given us. We must grieve Him and test Him all of the time. It must cause Jesus great pain to love us.

We all pray to have blessings, protection, provision, purpose, health and long life. Our focus should be on Christ. Christ taught us that He is "the way, the truth and the life." This shows God's power of transformation through living a life joined to Him. God never intended for us to

be alone, without His fellowship. We were created by Him for His purposes. We need Him to feel complete in our soul. Christ can make all things possible through His power. We should ask Him to completely transform our hearts and minds. How we need Him every hour of our lives!

I have always wondered how certain Bible characters talked to God. Did they actually hear His voice? How were they sure that God was directing them? Can we have that kind of relationship with God today? We can hear His voice through His Word. Can we feel His Spirit? We feel Him in our hearts. Does He direct our thoughts, feelings and will? Of course He does! By faith, we see Him every day through His promises of His unfailing love, guidance and purpose. We can see Him in others and in creation. It is not weird to seek God. It is wonderful to live a life of faith that centers on God. We have strange ideas about God. It is our twisted thinking that needs correction and training.

When we are useful and obedient, we can serve Him better. The same is true of Mustangs. I have found many unbroken Mustangs available on the internet. Once someone invests hours of training them, they are useful. It is a long process to gentle a Mustang. Don't believe those gimmicks or claims about quick training. It is a learning process for you and the horse together. I don't have any tricks or easy methods for working with Mustangs. Mustangs need time to mature. Even the disciples took years to develop into mature Christians. It has taken me a long time to mature in my faith. With every year of my life, I am still learning to trust Him more. We have to be patient with ourselves. We have to be patient with the Mustangs. Some things take years, not minutes to happen. There are no shortcuts or easy recipes.

There were many years that went by that I sat in church listening and learning. I had to learn the basics of Christianity. I went to Sunday School, VBS, Training Union, Girls Auxiliary, and countless services and revivals with some regularity. I did not come from a Christian home,

so if it weren't for my neighbors and friends I would have probably stayed home. I was a "spiritual Mustang." I did go forward at a revival in church when I was nine years old to join up to God's herd. But I remember being quite stagnant for a long time. I was "saved," and got stuck on salvation as the central theme of my faith. I felt fortunate, no doubt to be "saved', but after that was established, there wasn't much else going on. I wasn't experiencing any real spiritual growth. I lived like that for years, unaware that there was anything more to the Christian life.

My husband was a good spiritual leader for me because he was interested in my spiritual life. Together, after a time of learning and serving in a church, I became a missionary to Bolivia along with him. It shows how God corrals us to do His will. I was broken from my pride and self-sufficiency under His love. I am happy to wear His freeze mark. Maybe later I will write about our missionary experiences, but none of that would ever have happened, if I had not first been brought into His herd. That first step was to join up and then to learn when to change up. We all have to start somewhere. God is patient with us still. He is the perfect trainer.

I have spent many hours in the corral with the Mustangs. The weather made each day a challenge. There were numerous dog days of summer in this St. Louis area that seemed to last forever. To be outside with them meant continually being exposed to the weather. There were days that the humidity was sweltering and unbelievable. I was sunburned, drenched by sweat, wind burned, and soaked by rain. In the winter, the freezing temperatures plunged so low at times that I could not even feel my toes in my boots. We had extremes of bitter cold and boiling heat that made doing ground work with them a challenge. The Mustangs had to get used to me being outside with them constantly and in any kind of weather. I had to stand by them through these changes in order to build a connection to them.

Jesus came to us through His birth in utter poverty. Jesus suffered for us and felt what it is like to be human. Jesus came as a baby to earth and lived as a man. He wanted to be with us in our condition. He became acquainted with how we feel. Jesus entered our world to save us and adopt us. Love demands sacrifice in order to be demonstrated. No one can love without giving up something for the other. Jesus gave us all, He gave us His life. This powerful example of how Jesus lived among us is so simple that everyone in the world can understand it. God came to us through Jesus.

Nelly tromps through the mud and rain after a downpour.

The Mustangs did get used to me being with them in the corral. They began to act playful with me. Nelly would drink from the hose while I was filling the tank. They knocked my buckets over searching for feed. I tripped in the muddy stall and lost my boot in the mud. I pulled it out and set it down. Nelly ran off with the muddy boot in her mouth. It became a game of tag to her.

Mustangs have a strong sense of smell. They liked to smell my hair and nibble it, too. I usually had apple treats in my pockets, so that made me rather appealing to them. It was a good way for me to build their trust. Misty would act uninterested, but search for any crumbs on the ground. They were constantly watching and listening to my every move. Nothing got by them.

I had earned a certain status among them. I was no longer seen as a threat, but I was not quite one of them either. We were making progress. I was probably at the top of the pecking

order, but I did not have their complete submission. Maybe that is where a lot of people are with God. They are very familiar with church and use the right Christian jargon, but are not really ready to submit to His leading. These kind of half-hearted Christians are not there yet. They still have a long way to "grow." They are somewhere in that process. They are still a bit like Mustangs, still wanting to run wild and do whatever their impulses tell them to do.

I wore out my boots in those first two years. It is a good thing that I do not like to watch television, because that was given up in order to give them more time. Even though the Mustangs were a lot of work, they became the object of my love. The Bible is like a love letter to us. It says that we are the object of God's affection, that "God so loved the world." The affirmations in the Bible have a healing power for a wounded heart. He has loved us with an everlasting love through His actions. We caused Him a lot of work to rescue us.

Sharing the same bowl of sweet feed. They did not mind being extremely close to each other.

I call myself a "horse lover" or "horse crazy." It is a joke. I enjoy being with other "horse people." God is a "people lover." He fixates on us much in the same way. He is obsessed with us. His love was so great that He made a plan to have us live with Him forever. We were lost, wild and we were headed for destruction. The Bible says that God gave His only Son to save us from

perishing and give us eternal life. That simple message is called "the gospel" or "the good news." The cross represents His death, which is offensive to us because we are confronted with a choice that impacts eternity. When I think of Jesus on the cross, I think of His ultimate sacrifice.

In today's world it is hard to conceptualize why Jesus died on a cross. There was a great spiritual battle that occurred when Jesus died. My father was in the Army so I do have an understanding about military battles. My father would certainly talk about them over and over. I had an Uncle who was in the Navy. I never met him because he died near Pearl Harbor on the USS Lipscombe Bay. He was a true war hero. He paid with his life. I have always admired my uncle for his courage. Jesus died for all of us to be rescued from sin and death. Jesus is our ultimate war hero in the spiritual battle for our eternal freedom.

If it had only been that Jesus died for us, that would have been powerful, but the real victory was in His resurrection. When Jesus rose from the dead He showed His victory over death. Jesus took back what was lost in the fall, through Adam and Eve's disobedience and the consequences of sin. Many people have no idea that they are lost and spiritually dead without Christ, and that they are without the security of eternal life. We are in a spiritual battle everyday here on earth whether we want to be or not. I have watched many history programs about World War II. It was a terrible global conflict. But the spiritual battle for men's souls is far worse because of the eternal consequences for every living person. The good news is that the battle has already been won. When Jesus died and was raised from the dead, He defeated our enemy Satan, death and sin forever. It is done. It is finished. We have to believe in Him. It sounds simple because it is. God made it extremely simple for us to be saved.

Many people are living in spiritual ignorance. They are not familiar with the Story of Redemption. They do not know how the spiritual battle that has been won by King Jesus can

impact and change their lives today. My Mustangs would frustrate me because I provided clean water in a big galvanized tank. I would splash them and entice them to drink, but they still drank the filthy rain water mixed with their own manure in the puddles on the ground. It was disturbing to watch and it would exasperate me. That is why I had to be de-worm them so often. It is sad to watch defeated Christians who do not know what resources God has already provided for them. They have never tasted the Living Water and they are living in filth when they do not have to!

Misty drinks muddy water, even though she has clean water in the tank.

Water is an important element for life, Jesus offers us Living Water. That means He can satisfy our thirst. I had to refill that tank over and over. I washed it and scrubbed out scum and dust and refilled it. We need to be cleansed from time to time through confession and refilled with the Holy Spirit. God has provided all that we need through Christ. We have to turn to Him and ask for filling, cleansing and restoring as a normal way of living by faith.

Surely God is sad when He offers us so much and yet we choose, like the Mustangs, to turn back to old unclean habits and rejecting any help. I bought high quality hay with alfalfa mix.

I offered them sweet feed and treats. Yet in order to avoid me, sometimes they would rather eat dried leaves than eat from my bucket. If only they understood that everything I did for them was for their own good. I had to keep winning them over and over! Why couldn't they let go of that stubbornness and allow me to take care of them?

The Mustangs gave me a snapshot of myself, independent and frightened, rigidly trying to do things my own way! After many years of being in Christian work, I realized that I had not been totally captured by the Lord because I still had my streaks of wildness. Sometimes as I reflect on my life, maybe I spent so much time serving the Lord that it actually kept me from being close to the Him. It is ironic that even "Christian Ministry" can become an obstacle to an intimate relationship with God. Those who get side tracked by neurotic religious obsessiveness about methods, forms and styles can worry and focus on little details about approaching God, so much that it interferes with actually developing a genuine relationship with Him.

The Lord wants us to be close to Him. It is great to be involved in Christian Ministry and Service, but that is not why He loves us. He can get things done with or without you and me. I came to understand that because of my time spent in the corral. It made these things much clearer to me. I was able to think about deep things. It was so simple. He wanted a relationship with me, not a "work horse." We are not saved through religion, doing ministry, arguing rigidly over doctrinal arguments, doing the "right" customs or following "perfectly" old traditions. Maybe we think we have to be "spiritually correct" in order to be a Christian. It is not that complicated. Our relationship is based on our faith in Christ. That is why the Bible says that many will come up to Jesus talking about all of their works and He will tell them, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Granted, they never knew Him either. A "Child of God" knows Jesus personally through daily life experiences. We need to simply learn to walk with God.

Chapter 5 Fight or Flight

Life surrounds us, but we have become so technological that we ignore what goes on outdoors. We have become mechanical, detached and numbed. I enjoy being outside. There are many health benefits to sunlight. It provides vitamin D, helps the immune system and combats depression. You must use moderation about the amount of exposure you get, but the right amount of sunlight can be considered "mood therapy." It is much cheaper than a therapist. In the past, people lived closer to nature, but as we become more modernized we have adapted to being in a climate controlled environment all day. We don't live close to nature because we have gotten used to virtual reality. We need to go outdoors and explore what is in our own backyard. God brings teaching examples through nature.

Our daughter bought three ducklings for her pond. She called me and said that something had killed two of them. My grandkids were distraught because they did not see anything come near the ducklings. Their heads were bitten off, but you could see something under the water still eating them. It was a horrifying scene, but even children have to learn about life. We set some jug traps for the predator and waited until the next morning to catch him. We were expecting a big catfish. We were amazed to have caught a rather large snapping turtle.

She was able to get him into her canoe and waited for me to arrive. We had to figure out what to do with him. Animals frequently can get in the wrong place. Certainly a pond where children live is not the ideal place for a large snapping turtle to live. His claws were long and he could stretch his neck back quite far. He was a terrifying sight for the kids to see, especially knowing that he had killed the ducklings. I put a stick near his mouth and he chomped down on it. We needed to keep him away from the kids. Since we had caught him, it provided an opportunity to teach my grandchildren about the turtle's problem. He was in the wrong pond. We

gently got him into a trash can and drove him to a large lake. He swam out happily into the lake to have a better home, to find food, and hopefully, to live a long life.

The Mustangs today are located in the wrong place, exactly like that turtle. There are large herds and they are being removed from the West. There is a debate about the growing herds and differing opinions about what to do about the Mustang problem. The Mustangs Adoption Program is a humane way of dealing with their situation. The Mustangs need a new home. We can play a role in helping them to find a better home. We should study them more to understand how they survived. Their behaviors are fascinating and give us a glimpse of how horses were before they were domesticated.

The Mustangs had a ritual of grooming each other every evening, using their teeth to massage each other's necks and backs. It surprised me to watch how tenderly that they groomed each other. I seldom had to brush them. I have never seen any domestic horses grooming like that. Mustangs are more "herd bound" or buddy sour. That means that they were very attached to each other. You can see by my pictures that they were always close together.

Mustangs are prey animals because they have a strong fight or flight response. But Mustangs are very social within their own herd. There was a pecking order that was obvious to figure out. Negra was the dominant mare, then Nelly, and last, was Misty. Mustangs do not make noise, no neighs and no sounds, except for snorting. It isn't that they can't neigh, they don't neigh. Nelly and Misty never did neigh. I knew that Negra was becoming gentled when she began to neigh when she saw us.

Most horses sleep standing up. Another unusual characteristic about Mustangs was that they laid down flat on the ground while they were sleeping. I walked all the way to the corral to find them lying like that. Domestic horses rest by sitting on the ground with their heads upright.

But the Mustangs lie flat to protect themselves from predators. This took some getting used to because I had never seen this before. These horses had acquired behaviors to help them survive in the wild. I realized that I had to understand where they came from in order to reach them. They were always watching vigilantly and ready to run.

They always saw me, so I never could sneak up on them!

The book of Genesis explains how Adam hid from God after his disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Adam had a flight response because of fear. Adam hid from God, it does sound ridiculous because God is ever-present. In our lives, we may run from God, after our desire for freedom. We may act wild. Adam had mistrusted God and made a choice to disobey. He escaped from God's corral and protection. Adam was confused, lost and alone.

As horse handlers we always expect our horses to obey, but any reasonable person knows that they may not obey. There is always a sense of adventure when working with horses. At any time they can do something "stupid" or "goofy" because they are frightened, stubborn or tired. Some horses are plain lazy and resist doing what you want from them. Some horses may not come to the gate because they know it means a workout for them. They need to be motivated to

obey through rewards of food or loving attention. You have to be sure that they understand what you want them to do. They have to be familiar with your voice.

Mustangs have to be conditioned through daily contact and interaction. A relationship must be built by spending time together. There are many shows about horses and training them. Interesting as it may be to watch shows about horses, it is better to have the experience of the smells, the weather, and the adventure working with your horse. Mustangs add something unique and exciting to owning a horse. Everything is spontaneous and new as you learn together.

While you are outdoors, you have to dress appropriately. I bought a pair of rubber boots for working in the stall. I wore a duck down jacket in the winter because the wind can be fierce. It was not stylish, but it was perfect for the cold. The rain causes so much mud. Once I was caught in freezing rain, the drops froze on my eyelashes, hair and face. My clothes were frozen to my skin! I had to take a hot shower to feel warm again. You cannot be afraid to get dirty. We had all kinds of weather. There were many tornado warnings, ice storms, hail, torrential rains, thunder storms, strong winds, and record heat.

Nelly walking through the snow.

Insects are another problem to deal with when outside. Summer brought many nasty horse flies into our corral. Horse flies are larger than regular flies and they suck the horse's blood. It feels more like a bee sting to the horse than a fly bite. You can see a drop of blood on their coat after a big fly bites them. The flies bother them more than mosquitoes. I have bought fly spray and set out baited fly traps. I think the best thing is to keep spraying the horses because the traps were not that effective at all. Poor Negra would constantly drop into the dirt and roll to get the horse flies off of her back. The dirt seemed to discourage the flies from biting her. The flies did not bother me that much, but horses can become spooked by too many flies. You have to be careful when the flies become too overwhelming. I have used Avon's Skin-So-Soft Bath Oil and water to bathe the Mustangs when it became a problem. It works as a repellant for flies and mosquitoes. I don't believe it is harmful to them either.

To have fewer mosquitoes you should make sure that you do not have any sources of standing water. Mosquitoes need water to breed. I plant Marigolds because it is a natural way to repel mosquitoes. Marigolds are easy to grow and colorful. I detest mosquitoes because they carry the West Nile Virus that can infect both people and horses. I get the vaccine for my horses, but it is best also to minimize the breeding sources for mosquitoes as much as possible.

I have gotten stung by bees many times while near the corral. It is a good thing that I am not allergic to them. I have knocked down a lot of hornet's nests. There were always the dreaded wasps on patrol, I had to be careful. I do not mind bumble bees, because they seem to mind their own business. I did occasionally come inside the house and discover a beetle or a stink bug stuck in my hair. It is disgusting, but part of the price you pay for being around horses. Not a big deal.

We had lots of nice bales of our own fresh cut hay.

Mustangs like fresh hay. We were fortunate to have our own grass hay. They like open spaces to run. They do not like being cramped and avoid getting backed into corners. The corral that is specified by the BLM is made small to encourage more interaction with the handler. My corral looked small, but it was the right size. If you do not start out small, they will not come close to you. It is what you have to do. The limited size forces them to interact with you, later you can give them more space.

God sometimes maneuvers us into a corner to make us come to Him. We have all faced hard times in our lives when we have sought God. I know that when my father was killed in an accident, I felt forced into those "Everlasting Arms" that were supporting me. When we do not have any other place to run, it becomes obvious that we need to be still. We know that He is God because He "gives and takes away." We accept His will even if we don't like it or understand it. The healing place is in God's presence. Our transformation is caused by our relationship to God. Do we trust Him in today's shattered economy? Can we find rest in His corner? Can we be "anxious for nothing," like it says in Matthew 6?

It is good to know that God protects us. We may feel trapped by our circumstances, but God may be working through a flaw in our character and needing to get our attention. God protects us by saying "no." God builds certain fences in our lives to shield us from danger. The Mustangs did not like the fences. Where we live there are cars that pass by. I was concerned that they may not know how to act if they were up close to a car. They had to be in the fence to protect them. They did not understand that it was for their own good.

I remember the day that the Mustangs "escaped" from the corral where there was a loose board. I was running some errands when I got several calls from my neighbors to come home at once because the Mustangs were out. When I got there, I was surprised to see them out on our eight acres grazing quietly. Evidently they knew the perimeters of our land because they had watched us mow and stayed inside our property lines. I did not realize that they were aware of those boundaries until that moment. They did not run away and act wild like I imagined they would if this kind of thing happened.

I was not sure how I would get them back in the corral. I said a quick prayer asking for God's help to get them in. When we first thought about adopting Mustangs we knew that we would have to be careful because of the reputation of "wild horses." We were not sure about what to expect or how we would handle situations like this if they would arise. We had decided to trust God to face whatever came about. This was my worst fear coming true. Even domestic horses can have fence problems, but it is much less forgivable when it is a Mustang on the loose. I was doing errands in town, which was one positive note. I did not dare to think about if I had been at work!

Naturally, my husband was at a meeting that day. At that time there was no fence along the eight acres, only the fencing along the small corral. I had no idea what I should do next.

There were several neighbors there to help me, fortunately. My neighbors helped me patch the open panel with some bungee straps that I had remembered were in my trunk. It worked perfect to temporarily repair the fence. Everyone stood back as I opened the gate and yelled at them, calling each one of their names. I stood by the gate and pointed to the corral showing the Mustangs what I wanted. I had no other plan. I yelled, "Misty, Negra, Nelly, get back into that corral!"

The fencing for Mustangs has to be secure. We keep them inside to protect them.

While everyone watched, the Mustangs made a slow pace towards me and the gate. They walked in one by one into the corral. I shut the gate behind them. I realized then that they all knew their names. I stood around marveling at how easy it was to put them up. I know that God helped me that day. When I first got there my hands were shaking because I was not sure what would happen. I thought that they must have been looking at that green grass for some time, while they stood in the dusty dirt floor of the corral. Dry hay does not compare with lush green grass. I decided that I had to trust them more at some point. They had just passed their first test of obedience.

Now we considered them to be gentled, not broken to ride yet, but where we could catch them, lead them and control them. We decided to put an electric fence around the entire field to

let them have more space and the coveted grass. First, we strung the electric wire within the corral to get them used to it. Then, we enclosed the field with stands of electric wire. The first time that we let them out of the corral, they stood there rather perplexed. When I pointed to the field, they walked outside of the gate in disbelief. Suddenly, they took off running full speed along the fence line. They lifted their tails and seemed to be racing each other. Then they turned to the grass, munching here and there. Nelly was first to notice the electric fence. She got shocked as she tested it several times with her nose. She darted around and ran away from the fence quite annoyed. Misty was fearful, lagging behind and staying far away from it. Negra was too much into eating grass to bother with the fence.

After that, I began turning them out during the day to the fields. Each night, I would put them back into the corral by simply standing at the gate and pointing to the corral. They had learned that this was where they went at night. Sometimes I would leave some grain in their bowls as an additional incentive to go in. I was amazed at how fast they learned these new things. They were teachable. We were making progress!

I would stand on my deck looking out at the corral and see them looking back at me. It was strange. They were developing a reliance on us. I knew now that they saw me as the leader of the herd, the "dominant mare" perhaps, as I had been able to direct their movements by "herding" them where I wanted. Now we were finally starting to get somewhere!

I felt as if I knew the Mustangs much better now. It is like knowing God. It is not about knowing a lot of information about Him, but knowing Him intimately. I felt as if I knew each of the mares intimately. I knew what they would do and how they would react. I did not have any more surprises. Life was good at this point.

They call Illinois the "Prairie State." It is very flat. Our land has low spots that fill up with rain. We refer to this as our "soupy fields." When the Mustangs repeatedly walk over the dirt in the corral it quickly turns into mud. If enough rain falls it becomes a total mess. I always went to check on them after a storm. I usually found them standing together quietly in the barn. They liked to have a dry place to wait out the storm.

We get huge thunderstorms and tornados in the Midwest. They assure me that in Illinois, if I don't like the weather, just wait and it will change quickly. It can be insufferably hot and humid here in the summer. I had to leave my comfort zone indoors and suffer outside along with the Mustangs. You can only wish for a sudden storm to cool things off. There was a lightning storm one evening and I could not see them in the corral, so I ran out to check on them. I do believe that they took some comfort in hearing my voice as I called their names. I was stuck there in the barn with them until it was all over, but they did not seem to mind my being with them. I stayed until the lightning stopped.

We all need a quiet place to rest. God offers rest to His people as we learn to rely on Him. He is our emotional comforter, our shelter in the storm, our mighty fortress of protection and a strong tower above our troubles. He is our strength and our shield. He removes our fear. He changes our thoughts from worries to focused assurances of His love. Jesus has forgiven us and like the rain washes and cleanses, we are refreshed. We let go of negative feelings and the bitterness of past experiences as He transforms our hearts. He has given us the power to forgive others through His Spirit. God is our sanctuary in the storm. God is that warm shelter for us to run into. God is all we need to be safe and secure.

It was a relief to see the horses inside the corral. I would go back to the house and rest. There is a sweet peaceful feeling that comes when the day is done and everything is in its right

place. The horses are put up and well fed. Gates are locked, water tanks are full, and there is lots of hay. We can have the same security in our hearts about our eternal home. God's promises are real. We can experience some of the peace now, but we can know that we have eternal life because of what is written in the Bible. In Him, we are safe at last!

Nelly and Misty safely inside. What a wonderful sight!

Are you safely inside the security of God's salvation? No one is beyond God's reach because the Bible says that God saves to uttermost. When we think about the power of God, we can see great demonstrations of power in nature. Which is nothing compared to His power to save us from sin! We have a powerful God! We are also kept by the power of God. He keeps us safe and secure by His salvation. My grandkids came home from church singing one line of the old hymn, "There's power in the blood, power in the blood!" What a great old hymn! We have got to understand His power and praise Him for all of His work in us.

Chapter 6 God Speaks to Us

When I first got back to the States I worked as a domestic violence counselor. I could not help but absorb the negativity of my work. I only did that for three years, which seemed much longer than that. I believed that it was not just a job, but that it was my calling to help women become safe. I would get discouraged by hearing about their problematic situations. I was sitting on the courthouse steps feeling consumed with doubts about how God could allow so much cruelty in the world. As I looked up, I noticed about ten doves standing in front of me on the steps. I almost ignored it, but they seemed to be saying, "Look at us, we are doves of peace!" There were too many of them to ignore!

God speaks to us in metaphors as much as with words. I used to think that reading the Bible was the only way God should, could or would speak to me. Although I do not dismiss the merit of the Bible, when I consider the greatness of God, such as His dominion over nature, why limit Him? Surely He speaks to us personally. He gives us individual direction. He loves us intimately, up close and in a deeply personal way. God used a dove to show Noah that there was dry land. At the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove, which was a word picture for the crowd. He always communicates to His people in a way that they can understand.

I felt God with me that day on those steps. When my client met me a few minutes later, I told her to watch for the doves that were everywhere. They were a sign that everything would be okay. I came to rely on the presence of His Spirit with me in my job. He can use doves and whatever else He wants to use because He is God.

I became especially distressed with cases that involved children. The court system seemed slow and imperfect. I always was praying in my heart in the courtroom. I recall seeing a double rainbow one day when I came out of the courthouse. It was a powerful image that

delivered a message to me. A rainbow is a stunning symbol about God's promises. I was thankful for the way that God encouraged me. I would write these things down because I wanted to remind myself later and not forget it. My faith was strengthened through those kinds of intimate experiences. I was thankful to God for the assurance of His presence with me and through His special ways to speak to me.

I have seen beautiful sunsets here in the Midwest. There was a sunset that was so awesome I had to take a picture of it. I used my cell phone to capture the last fading part of the sun setting. I showed my daughter and she said, "What is that?" I told her that it was "a beautiful sunset!" Imagine a sunset, here a few minutes and then gone. Can we see God in the sunset? Do we see Him in nature? Have you felt His presence in your life? Look for Him! You will find Him!

Sunsets in Southern Illinois are so beautiful! Amazing colors!

Being able to see truth in nature is like finding the answers to your questions without having to read a book. I have been a student for many years. Formal education makes you adopt a mindset about knowledge. It becomes so mechanical, so dry. It is based on what intellectual men think, believe and imagine. We become conditioned to think that learning only occurs in a classroom in formal settings. God's way of teaching us is by using the physical world and the spiritual world. God has an eternal perspective that is based on love. There are many problems that education cannot fix, or begin to explain. Education cannot change people into loving persons or make them spiritual. Only God can do what God does. Many people look for solutions to spiritual problems by using their human intelligence, strength, wealth, information and human resources. Without God we are nothing. Without God there may be knowledge, but not wisdom or spiritual discernment. The fear or reverence of God is true wisdom as it says in Proverbs, not through a degree from a University.

We learn to walk in the Spirit by experiencing the new birth in Christ. I have learned to "walk in the Spirit" from moment to moment. It is not something that you can store up. It is spontaneous! You walk in the “here and now.” Reading the Bible helps us to learn about God. The Bible tells us to fellowship together with other believers. We become a spiritual family through the unity of our faith. Like a baby grows and matures, we must grow spiritually as well. Too many baby Christians need to grow up and learn to live a blessed life in Christ.

Being in God's House is a good place to "grow." At my church, they call it "God's House." I don't know if that is a Southern Illinois expression or not, but I like to think of my church as God's House. I really love my little country church! Pastor Tom is a great encouragement to us in the ministry. I love the church people, the fellowship and the great

potlucks. We have fun together. I look forward to going to God's House because of the people. They are like a spiritual family to me and I can be myself there.

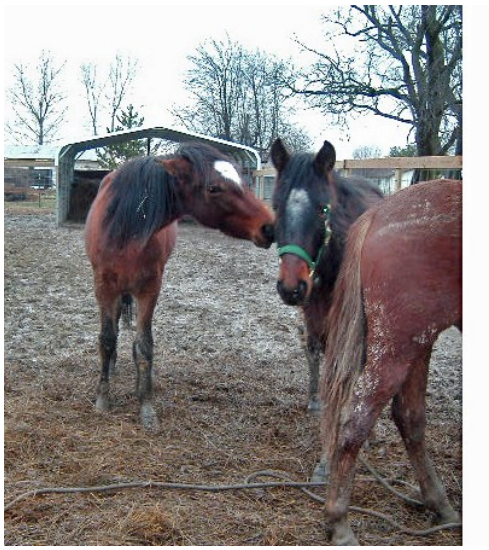
When the Mustangs first arrived on our property, they each had halters and a twenty foot rope to enable you to work with them. The ropes broke off because they pulled them through mud and water and they were constantly stepping on the ends. Misty would always get her halter off. I wanted to at least have a halter on them so I could catch them. I had different people help me rope them and get the halters back on. Negra and Nelly got to the point where they would stand still and let me put the halters on or take them off, but not Misty.

Misty was a constant troublemaker. She was stubborn and not going to submit. She usually had her ears back and would paw the ground to intimidate me. I did not provoke her. She would snort and become frantic when I got too close. She was not interested in food either. Misty had more of the fight response instead of flight. I was never sure what Misty would do because she put up a front. I had less interest in working with her because of her nasty attitude. Misty did not progress at all with me. There are Christians that never seem to experience any change in their lives, yet there are many means provided for them to grow. The same freedom that allows them to have the opportunity to change also allows them to refuse it. Misty had a choice to obey or not obey. She normally chose to disobey because of her problem with anyone having authority over her. Misty was a true Mustang!

The three mares were not being gentled at the same pace at the same time. Negra was the first to become easy to handle. I stood on her back while I fixed a loose board on the corral. We saddled her once in the round pen, and to my surprise, she did not buck or flinch. She stood there gazing at us as if to say, "What now?" But the other two were not nearly as easy. Nelly was

warming up to us, but Misty would constantly hide behind the other two. She was not going to get close. Misty really acted like a mule sometimes.

Typical of Misty, constantly turning away. Her ears back show her negative feelings.



Misty was the most stubborn, here she is having an attitude.

If I regret one decision that we made about adopting the Mustangs, it is that we decided to take three horses at once instead of one. Originally, we had set out to adopt one, but of course, they encourage multiple adoptions because of the number of horses that they have to place. Horses are herd animals and they prefer to have a companion in order to adjust more readily to a

new situation. I believe that Negra would have made a good only horse. I believe that we would have been riding her if we had not had the other two horses.

When I let them out into the big field in the morning, Misty would usually do this kick-in-the-air thing while running. It was a funny sight because her back end would lift off the ground as her back legs would fly high in the air. I asked a friend of mine what to make of that. He said, "She is just being a horse." Being a horse means kicking up your feet and running around the pasture! Misty was so happy to get out and stretch her legs. Her joy could not be contained without some added spunk. She did have a lot of energy and would have made a good endurance horse. So Misty spent most of her time with us "just being a horse!"

That is like some Christians who come to church, they are there, just being a Christian. They may not be very useful to the Lord or others, they enjoy all of the benefits and blessings, but they are not broken, not tamed and do their own thing. Certainly there is something wrong with that picture. Do you know any spiritual Mustangs? Maybe you identify with that example and maybe you want to change it. God is always patient and willing to help us.

God wants obedience, it is better than sacrifice. I had a twisted thought that I had sacrificed so much because I was a missionary, but God was not even interested in those things. Sometimes people can be motivated to get approval of others or simply enjoy the attention and it may not be God-centered at all. How we can deceive ourselves!

Our love for the Lord should be real, natural and unfeigned as it comes out of a private relationship with Him. Our will must be broken to conform to His. There a point of surrender and submission. Jesus said, "Not my will, but Yours." Are we willing to let God do what He wants with our life? Does He want to use us to glorify Him? Will we obey Him? Do we give Him the glory in our lives or take it for ourselves?

Chapter 7 A Horse is a Horse

There are many breeds of horses that are bred to do different skills and possess certain qualities. Usually a horse that is good in one area, like trail riding, will not automatically make a good jumper. If a horse is trained in one skill, it may confuse them and cause difficulty for them to develop another skill. Horse breeders pay careful attention to blood lines. Mustangs have no record of blood lines. They have not been known for any particular type of riding skill. Some Mustangs were used for the Pony Express and endurance riding. Recently, I read that they are using Mustangs for the Border Patrol. Mustangs are tough horses because of their feral background.

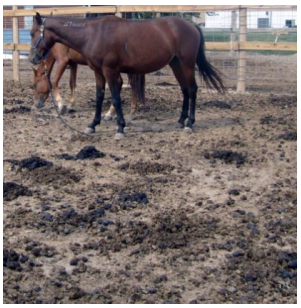
Nelly near the hay in the snow.

Some horse breeders do not like Mustangs because they are inexpensive and there are so many available that they drive the cost of domestic horses down. They are a mix of breeds that they are not clearly a breed at all. Many times unbroken Mustangs wind up at auctions. The idea of a feral horse brings with it the notion of a wild crazy animal. When untamed, most of them continue to stay afraid of people. If a Mustang acts "crazy" and is hard to handle, it could be because they have been abused or not handled at all. Just the name "Mustang" may seem negative to some people. There are still many myths about Mustangs.

While there are many myths, there are some truths about them. I never got them to a point where a farrier could trim their hooves. A simple thing like hoof trimming became a major issue. I decided to just let it go. The Mustangs were too afraid to have their feet touched by a stranger. I heard about using a tranquilizer to trim their hooves, but that requires a vet. At any rate, that was a real problem. Their hooves broke off with time, but I knew that it would have been better to have them trimmed. I wish that I had been able to get them to the point where they would let the farrier trim their hooves.

One of my friends was telling me that he did not think it mattered whether or not I had Mustangs because "a horse is a horse." I think that was the best advice that I had heard for awhile. When I began to look at them as horses, not just Mustangs, it helped me to see them differently. I had to find ways to calm them down. I decided to try some things that I would use with any domestic horse. So it came down to giving them treats and grooming.

One way to help a horse to be calm near you is to offer food. Treats make a nice peace offering and gives them a motivation to get close to you. Grooming, brushing and bathing also helps to desensitize them. Many horses are fearful because they have had limited contact by a handler. Using a brush and warm water provides a chance to connect with your horse. Normally young foals are groomed by their mothers at birth, so bathing allows you to provide them with a nurturing experience.



Inside the corral was never clean. They needed a bath from time to time!

Negra bathed and beautiful! She will go and roll in the dirt as soon as I let her go!

I had a pole set up inside the corral. I used it to bathe Negra and Nelly. I tried to work with them so that they would stand still for the farrier. They would not let anyone touch their feet besides me. I am not a farrier, so I could not trim their feet. Negra was the only one that enjoyed her bath. Negra liked to be scratched and combed. After her bath, she immediately would go roll in the dirt. I could bathe Nelly, but she never liked it. Nelly would push and pull until it was done. Misty had no halter most of the time, so I did not even try to bathe her.

Always watch what the horse is doing as a way to check their feelings. A movement of the tail, ears, and feet can indicate anxiety. Notice where they are looking, as that shows where their interest lies, hopefully that will be you. It is important to pay attention when a horse is chewing because that is how they relax. When you are working with a horse and they stop chewing, it may be that they are feeling nervous or threatened. I always like to see the chewing motion because I know then that they are calm. Chewing is always a good sign!

There are many ways to communicate with Mustangs. I would pack my pockets with apple treats to entice them. They have a keen sense of smell. They know that you are near before

they have seen you. While Mustangs do not usually neigh like domesticated horses, they do make other sounds, like grunting or snorting. These sounds demonstrate their displeasure. Watch the position of their ears as it indicates that they are listening. The ears will also be a good indicator when they are upset. When their ears go straight back, it is not a good sign.

It is a natural reaction for a horse to communicate with their whole body. Horses cannot disguise their emotions like people do. Horses cannot lie. They use body language to show emotions, turning their back to you as rejection. They block each other and create obstacles. Negra constantly came between Misty and me to act as a shield. Negra knew that Misty could be aggressive. Later as I looked back at some of the pictures it occurred to me that Negra did this instinctively. Misty held back and kept her distance, usually farther away from me.

This time Nelly has lost her halter and Misty has hers! Misty is doing the "I'm so shy act"!

It is good to develop your own basic horsemanship rules. Be aware that Mustangs do not see like people, their eyes do not catch the full view, so allow for them to see you by adding your voice as a guide. Tell them what you are doing as you do it. Use your voice as a tool to calm and maneuver the horse to do what you want. I would talk to them constantly. I would sing when I

was doing chores around them. They can understand basic verbal commands by repetition and using body language. Use your arm to point to where you want them to go.

It has been said that elephants do not forget, but horses do not forget either. They have an amazing capacity to remember good and bad experiences. I had a horse that was head-shy and I was sure that someone had hit her in the face. It took me a lot of desensitizing to undo that behavior. I never hit her, but she had learned to react to any movements near her head by jerking back. I do not feel that it is ever necessary to hit a horse. It is harmful to hit a horse because the horse can develop undesirable reactions. It takes a long time to correct bad behaviors. The worst part about using force is that it will break down the trust between you and the horse. It can damage the relationship that you are trying to build. It is just not worth using force.

As you enter their space, be aware that even though they have a lot of weight and size, you still have advantages over them. When you control their halter, you have control of their head. When you control the head, you control the horse. From the halter you limit their movement and they are vulnerable. You have become equalized by using the halter.

I had a small whip that I used as a pointer in the round pen. I threw it away because they feared the appearance of the whip. I used my arm to indicate where they should go and it was more effective because it was a part of me. I am sure that even owning a whip was a mistake. That is what happens when you buy horse training DVDs. I learned with Mustangs less is better! There is no need for using gimmicks, just remember to do your ground work.

I should mention that Mustangs can perceive when a person is afraid of them. This creates a problem for both the handler and the horse. The horse may demonstrate dominant behavior as a reactive response to a person's fear. The horse must learn to respect the person's body space. Head pushing or stepping on your feet are indicators that they do not respect your

personal space. It is easy to remedy that problem. I made my horses walk backwards when they would step on me. It works quite effectively because horses do not like walking backwards.

Many people are afraid of horses because of the potential for accidents. Horses can hurt you because of their size. People who have had little exposure to horses may have more trouble feeling comfortable near them. You have to work out those fears. You will feel more relaxed around your horses the more time you spend with them. Usually you need to be doing things around the horse, like cleaning stalls, washing the water tank and maintaining the fence in order to normalize your activities near the horse, but not focusing directly on them. This is a non-threatening way to gain experience while being near them.

If you are afraid, ask God to help you. I always prayed before I entered the corral to give me a greater sense of peace. You may have a feeling of uncertainty when you are near them. I thank God that I was never injured by any of my Mustangs. I have fallen off of horses many times before in my life, but I have never broken a bone. You cannot expect everything to always go perfect, but you have to use common sense and be alert. Surely no one wants to be injured by their horse. God can keep you safe in the corral. There is serenity when God's Spirit is in your heart and the horses can feel it.

Chapter 8 Caretakers of Creation

God created the world and everything in it. I believe that we have a responsibility to care for His creation. People who have not developed compassion towards animals may abuse them. When I worked as a domestic violence counselor, it was not unusual to find that in some of those situations, even their animals were mistreated. We should have a balanced view about how to treat animals. I think that it is cruel to abuse animals. I am not an extremist trying to push animal rights, but more sensitivity is surely needed. Severe animal abuse is a sign of a mental illness.

Violence does not please God. I am positive that He is deeply saddened by acts of cruelty to animals and much more so, to people. We have gotten used to living in a world filled with violence, cruelty and brutality. We are so desensitized that it almost seems "normal" to us. Violence is a characteristic of people without God. Abusive people have a history of neglecting animals. Proverbs 12:10 affirms that an upright or holy man considers the life of his animal.

I often feel disgust when I read the paper or listen to the news because there are too many negative reports. I am distraught by crimes against children. I cannot understand how abortion ever became legal in this country. It is shocking to contemplate the kind of violence involved in killing an unborn baby while safely in the womb. How could any civilized person consider this as a "solution" to a pregnancy? Just because something is legal, it does not make it morally right. Slavery should have taught us that. It does not matter if it is unplanned or unwanted, all because of the misguided logic of them being in an "unwanted" category. Anything "unwanted" must be destroyed in our modern culture whether it is babies or Mustangs. How God must grieve over our ignorance and sinfulness! How we must break His heart by our wild choices.

We have become dehumanized through our own selfishness. We need to show more kindness and compassion to people as well as animals. We will feel better about ourselves when

we act responsibly. Why do we have so much mental illness in the USA? Having a good self-esteem is easy when you do the right thing. But people nowadays don't know what the right thing is. There are people who have trouble taking care of themselves, much less, taking care of their animals. We may have knowledge, but we lack discernment. Wisdom only comes from God. If we turn away from God's wisdom, we become ignorant, destructive and savage.

Mustangs find themselves in the unwanted category. It would be a shame to slaughter Mustangs. We live in a wasteful society. We would rather destroy than preserve. In generations to come, what will they think of us? There are serious questions to be asked about responsibility, maturity and courage. Maybe the Mustangs are right, people really are predators. Perhaps we have to think more about our purpose in life and why we are here. What legacy will we leave behind? Thank God there are some people who care and are trying to save Mustangs.

Our Mustangs developed a dependence on us as we cared for them. They came to us to get their feed, hay and water, (although they still would drink from mud puddles for a while.) They understood that they were not on their own. I enjoyed watching them playfully run each evening as the sun went down. I grew in my dependence on God by owning them. The Mustangs helped me to renew my spiritual life. I was able to reflect on my midlife changes when I was in the corral. A corral with Mustangs was a strange place indeed to find a peaceful presence of overwhelming serenity.

As the Mustangs became more fully mature, they began acting "marish" or hormonal. They were now over three years old and Negra was first to begin testing the fence. Now I know why they do not recommend an electric fence or a barbed wire fence for Mustangs. Everything changed with them as they became more sexually mature. Mares normally come into heat in the spring and can be bred until early July. Our troubles began as our Mustangs began going into

heat.

My husband and I began to talk about how to handle this new development. Putting a six foot high wooden fence around eight acres would cost a fortune, so that was out. We could put them back into the corral, but then we would have to buy hay. They had gotten used to having space to run and it seemed like punishment to keep them in there again. We had to make some important decisions and make them soon.

There is always a doubt about safety when you work with a feral animal, whether it is a tiger or a Mustang. They have very strong instincts, and may be triggered by previous experiences. The Mustangs as they matured, it was natural for them to enter heat which is called estrus. I could not change their drive to procreate. I was not happy with considering letting them go, and I was relieved by the thought of not worrying about them getting out anymore.

In all of the craziness of our midlife adjustments, we adopted Mustangs. My husband and I have always been dreamers. I am sure that being missionaries was also a part of that. The Mustangs gave me back the adventurous part of myself that I somehow lost along the way. They brought back a magical ingredient to my life. Through them I found solitude, strength and refreshment for my weary soul. I felt restored through their strength and renewed by the challenge of working with them. They brought me a kind of balm of Gilead which provided a certain kind of healing touch in my life.

For a while the Mustangs brought us a lot of joy. I loved to watch them. I have great memories of special days with them. It was a therapeutic experience for my tired mind. I would stop and listen to the birds singing. I learned their different calls. I didn't realize then, but I was burned out from too much work, study and travel. I thought that I was going to rescue them, but they rescued me. My original goal was to honor God by adopting Mustangs. I never thought of

the many other benefits that would come by having them.

The Mustangs made me become more patient. I was so busy all of the time. Maybe I had too many moves, too many goodbyes, too many changes that made me dull and exhausted. I missed the energy of having a deep passion about something. Taking care of the Mustangs renewed my enthusiasm about horses. I wanted a new experience that was provided heartily by the Mustangs. We all need experiences that stretch our faith. If we stay within what is familiar to us in the comfort zone, nothing happens. In the spiritual realm, growth does not occur naturally just because time passes. We have to push the limits in order to grow and that is why change is good for us. The Mustangs added challenges and excitement to my somewhat plain Southern Illinois life. They caused me to test my faith in situations that I could not control.

We go through seasons of our lives. Change is a part of our life cycle as we move forward into each new phase. During the past ten years my husband and I had many major changes in our lives. We returned to the States permanently after living for many years in South America. We found new jobs in Illinois. All of our children grew up, got married and left home. I continued to study to be more qualified in my job. I finished two Masters Degrees while working. It makes my head spin to think about how much change occurred in our lives in just a few years. We tried so hard to adapt to the "rat race" and living in the United States once again.

Sometimes there are circumstances that may force us to make changes. The problem of the Mustangs escaping was discouraging to us. By now, I had to keep them in the corral all the time. They could not get out of the six foot high fence, but the space seemed so small for all of them. I had turned into the "warden." They looked so sad in the corral, and I was afraid that I would break their spirit. I felt frustrated with this situation and so were they.

We were beginning to think that we could not trust them to stay in the fence if we let

them out again. I had to keep them in that small corral for their own safety. It was not anyone's fault, it was just how changes occur in nature. I think that you can have success with Mustangs, but there is that possibility that they may revert back to that wild part of them. They must constantly struggle with that wild nature within even after they have been gentled.

We went through different phases with the Mustangs. I was going through my own season of changes in my life as I was getting older. God can teach us through many circumstances as we mature. It is good to hold on to some of your interests even as Christians. As my grandson says, "Jesus makes me happy." The Mustangs made us happy. We will always be thankful for the time that we had with them because it helped us to reconnect with each other and with God. He does give us "the desires of our hearts."

If it had not been for the Mustangs, I would have missed many quiet times with the Lord. The Mustangs showed me a picture of my restless character. I had survived the mission field by adapting to the language and the culture. I had recovered from several serious illnesses that I had while in Bolivia. It was stressful and tiring, draining me in many ways. It was time for me to slow down so that I could reflect over the last twenty years. It was time to rest.

The Mustangs were strong and courageous, but they were fearful and wild. They had a confusing mixture of opposite qualities. They gave me insight into my own incongruence and spiritual disconnect with God. You can serve God like the Mad Hatter, but be quite far away from Him. Doing Christian activities doesn't necessarily mean that you have a real relationship with Him. Too many people have God in their "box," something they take out when needed, but not a vital part of their lives. I had to get a fresh revelation of God. I had to understand why relationship is more important than service. I had gotten the cart before the horse!

Sometimes, God uses the simplest things to speak to us. He can use anything He desires

because He wants us to join up to Him so that we can be used for His glory. With all of our sins, it is a miracle that He can use us! In spite of ourselves, He still chooses to use us because of His unconditional love. God has rescued us from sin and death and wants us to live with Him forever. We need to get on track to live our lives with God at the center. Jesus is the way to heaven, but He is "the life," or the way to live our lives. He provides with us "life assurance," the blessed assurance of His presence forever. It is free for us because Jesus paid the price for our blessings. Jesus is the only way to heaven as it says in John 14:6.

After the fence problem, I felt that I was ready to move on to a horse that was a little less challenging. Sometimes God has to bring us into a full circle. The Mustangs matured and so our fences would no longer hold them. There comes a time to let go. Letting go is a difficult process because it creates other adjustments. I felt peaceful about letting the Mustangs go because they had finished their job helping me become "gentled" to God's Spirit.

If you are frustrated by a not so "perfect" life, remember that God teaches us in the trenches. He is not concerned with "success" stories or the focus on winning as we have in our culture. We did not get the Mustangs to be saddle broke. Not all of our efforts came out perfect, but it does not matter because God was working through them to develop our character. We had to calm down, be patient, stop and listen. As a result, we were becoming more like Him. If we have Christ, we are winners and more than conquerors no matter what happens.

Chapter 9 Trusting God to Make the Right Decisions

Misty, Nelly, and Negra.

While I made progress with Negra in those three years, the other two horses were not nearly as tamed. Nelly was still hard to catch and Misty usually had her back to me. The Mustangs had been getting more difficult as they went into heat and usually that was all of them at the same time. Now I had to keep them in the small corral. The electric fence was no longer as reliable to keep them in. They still needed a lot of work. I was gone all day and I found myself too tired to deal with them. When I could I worked with Negra because she responded the best.

One day, while walking back from the corral I stopped in the field and prayed. They were unhappy being shut in the corral with limited grass and not much room to run. I asked God to help me to know what to do with them. I had rescued them, but to what end? Maybe I was in over my head, or should I try to breed them once and for all? I already knew no one would want to do that, except for a friend who had a Mustang stallion two hours away. This was getting far too complicated, but I had considered it.

A few days later a man drove up to my house, knocked on the door and asked me, "Are

those Mustangs?" I told him, "of course they are Mustangs." He saw the freeze mark on them from the road. He said that he came from Colorado and that he was a cowboy. He asked if he could buy them. He told me that he was looking for a few Mustangs to train because he had trouble finding a job. I told him that he could have them if he promised me that he would treat them well. I felt in my heart that he was trustworthy. God had sent him my way to help me with the Mustangs. I had never been alone in this project. God always helped me.

I told him that I had the title to all of them. I needed someone who would continue to work with my troublemakers, Misty and Nelly. I still wanted to keep Negra because I thought that I still could do something with her. I could not give up on her as easily. He came back the next day with a stock trailer. I was sure that we would be all day getting the two testy mares into the trailer. I cannot believe what happened. This man went into the corral and called them to him. Nelly came first and he grabbed her gently by the halter. She walked into the trailer as if she had done this every week. He had an amazing way with them.

Misty was next and she followed Nelly into the trailer. I could tell that this man could handle horses much better than I could. He was very calm and spoke to them. I gave him the papers from the BLM and wished him well. I told him that I had been praying for someone to come and take the two mares off my hands. He told me that he had also been praying that he could find a way to get "back into horses again." Imagine that! It must have been a God thing.

Negra stayed with us for a few more weeks. I kept hoping that she would stop testing the fence. If I let her out into the field to run, it was not long before she would be outside of the electric fence once again. Negra usually stayed close to the front yard or in the back where the chickens were, but she was not inside the fence. It was very discouraging for me.

I live in a small community near a county road. I could not let her just wander outside.

One morning I stepped out of my front door and she was standing there again. I knew that I had to find her a new home. I prayed again about what to do. This time I decided to put an ad in the local newspaper. With so many farms near surely someone would want to make her into a 4-H project. I put in an ad that said, "Free Mustang Mare. Black. Three and 1/2 years old. Will make a great 4-H project. I have started her with basic ground manners. Halter broke. Tame, but not broke to ride. Needs a good fence. Free to Good Home Only. Call me if interested."

To my surprise I did get about ten calls. The young boy called and said that he had always wanted a Mustang for a 4-H project. He told me that his parents were in agreement with him having a Mustang and that he had been around horses all of his life. He said that their fences were made for cows and that she would not get out. I knew that this was the right match for Negra.

I was somewhat sad because I knew I had taken Negra as far as I could. Everyone has limitations of time, money and energy. She needed more from me. She needed a secure fence so that she would not run into a highway or get into trouble in the neighborhood. I had prayed about it and this was the best solution. When I first got these mares my goal was to be able to save a few Mustangs, as I reread my diary I saw that my intentions were to rescue them. I did not expect to learn so much about myself through adopting them.

God had helped me through lightning storms, broken fences and kept me safe in the corral every day. I recalled that I never had a single problem with any accidents or injuries. I had not been hurt, bitten or kicked. I had a lot of fun playing with them. They were far from being bomb proof, but they came a long way from when they first came to our place. These were good things to think about. There were no regrets about adopting them.

When the young boy came to the house to get Negra, his family brought a horse trailer.

Negra liked the attention and she behaved wonderfully, stepping up into the trailer without any problem. After three years together, she was gone. It was a grievous moment and now the corral seemed very empty.

I waited a few months before I considered getting any other horses. Now I have three mares again, but they are not Mustangs. I went back to domestic horses because I wanted to enjoy them more and do less training. Angel is a twenty year old American Ranch Horse, Daisy is a twenty year old Morgan and Cupid is a seven year old miniature horse. I enjoy having horses once again, but I was ready to have horses that were already tame for our grandchildren to enjoy.

I saw an ad for a free mare, an America Ranch Horse named Angel. The first time I saw her I knew that she was exactly what I was looking for. Angel is about 15.5 hands tall. Since I am getting older, we have a lot in common. Angel is a sorrel horse with a blaze and socks. She is the tamest horse in the world. She is really is an Angel!

Photo credit: Robert Evaul

After the Mustangs were gone, Angel gave me back the joy of riding again!

Angel used to do trails for hours in her younger years. I have learned that with Senior Feed, deworming on schedule, keeping her teeth floated, good alfalfa hay and maintaining regular vet visits helps her to look beautiful. Angel needs a lot of TLC, and I hope that she lives forever! Senior horses are special too! Everyone loves Angel! Life does go on!

Then I found Daisy. Daisy is solid black. She is blind in one eye and has a hump in her

neck. Daisy is about 13-14 hands high. She has diabetic tendencies so she needs a low starch feed. Her redeeming quality is that she is great with our grandkids. She is as "dead broke" as Angel. I never trained either one of these older mares. These horses have absolutely no issues whatsoever. They stay in the electric fence all the time. They never test it. My grandchildren began riding from the time that they were two years old on these older horses. I can trust these horses completely around the kids. How sweet it is! I love my horses!

Photo credit: Robert Evaul

Daisy always stays in the electric fence whether it is on or not! Good Old Daisy!

Angel and Daisy are what they call "babysitters."

Later, I saw an ad for Cupid and I was in love. Cupid is our black and white miniature mare. Cupid is seven years old. I wanted her for our youngest grandson. She is amazingly kid friendly. I tie Cupid up in the front yard to eat grass. Cupid has a fan club of friends that drive by and yell out, "Cupid!" She is like a toy, totally manageable, and a big switch from Mustangs. She is my first miniature horse. This summer I had her bred to a Miniature Palomino and next year we will have a mini foal. I can't wait! Now my horse collection is complete! Thank God for all of my horses! So many horses to choose from, how wonderful!

Cupid is a miniature horse, 34 inches, not hands! She has blue eyes!

This is her "centerfold" photo! She loves having her picture taken!

Since we became grandparents and as more grandchildren came along, naturally, our attention shifted more and more on the grandchildren. The Mustangs became too much of a risk to be around them. We wanted the grandkids to enjoy horses. With Angel, Daisy and Cupid we do not have to worry. We can trust these mares around them. They were already kid safe. I found them at the right time to bring a lot of enjoyment to the grandkids and to us.

Our children have been blessings in our lives and our grandchildren as well. Horses have always been a blessing in my life. They helped me to connect with God. They helped my husband and me to become closer as a couple as we got into this "Mustang Thing." Horses gave us great memories with our children in Bolivia as we raced down those sandy roads to the lagoon, sometimes chasing a full moon. Now we can share all of this horsing around with the grandchildren. This is the best part of all!

Looking back, I had succeeded in my goals of rescuing the Mustangs, learning about them and finding them a good home. It took a long time to get as far as I did with them. I met obstacles whenever I said the word, "Mustang," because not everyone likes them. I am at peace within myself because I did my part in trying to save them. They are beautiful, strong and a symbol of survival. They are a living legacy of the history of the Wild West. They are, in many ways, a dream.

I wanted to write about my experience with the Mustangs in a simple, uncomplicated way. I do not pretend to be an expert or to have all of the answers. My faith in God was a big part of my motivation and feeling like I had the capacity to take this on at my age. Being a grandmother has changed my priorities as well as my interests. I love horses, but I love my grandchildren even more. I need to have safe horses. Being a grandmother trumps all other things, and I consider it to be my number one priority in my life. My passion and obsession has

shifted from Mustangs to grandkids. Perhaps someone will take an interest in adopting Mustangs by understanding more about them through what I have written. As honest as I have tried to be about them, I still want to encourage others to adopt Mustangs.

If I were to do it again, I would have adopted one Mustang at a time. God helped me to care for the Mustangs and kept me safe. I did succeed in rescuing them and that is what I had intended to do from the start. I believe that our Mustangs probably will become someone's special horse one day. I am very thankful for the experience of adopting Mustangs. It inspired me to seek God in a deeper way, so it was worth it. My husband and I benefited by having a renewed closeness as we worked together with them. I was given a gift of spiritual restoration and refreshment through the Mustangs! It was fun and I will never forget the experience.

While I wrote about adopting Mustangs, I do not want to stop without mentioning that God is also in the adoption business. We are His spiritual sons and daughters by adoption into the faith. God made a way for us to survive and live with Him forever in heaven. This world is not the final corral. Jesus came on a rescue mission to earth to save us. He loved us while we were still wild in our sins. God gave us an example of great love by His redemption of mankind. You are only one prayer away from being adopted into His family. I invite you to ask Jesus into your heart, not for "fire insurance" as they say, but so that you too can have a relationship with Him. How I wish that you could know Him so that you could enjoy His transforming power in your life!

In conclusion, this was my story about Adopting Mustangs. God used those wonderful animals to reach into my life. I do not know why horses fascinate me so much, perhaps God plants the desires in our hearts so that it will turn into a blessing for us. Maybe it helps us as we go through life to have an interest that will bring us joy. I am thankful for adopting our Mustangs

because it was an amazing experience that allowed me to fulfill a dream.

It is my prayer that this book will deepen your faith and understanding about God. We need to know the beauty of letting go and being gentled by the Master. We don't need to live like Spiritual Mustangs. I invite you to come and experience a deeper faith in the Living God! There is so much more to living the Chrisitan life through having a personal walk with God. He wants us to depend on Him in all circumstances and not rely on our own strength and abilities. Like the Mustangs, we need to come to the point of being broken through love. Love is powerful. God's love for us is beyond our imagination. God loves you with an eternal love and He wants you to know Him.

God's incredible love for us gives us hope. God is love. His love is perfect. He captures us by His amazing love. He created us for His pleasure and He wants us to seek Him. He deserves our worship because He is worthy as it says in Revelation 4:11. He has given us a free will to be able to decide if we will join up with Him. Not only does He hold the gate open, He is the gate to eternity and peace. We need to know God more. God loves us so much that He wants everyone to be rescued.

Maybe you need to get away and spend some time quietly before the Lord. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Give Him thanks for His Salvation and Unspeakable Gift of Jesus Christ. Your life can change. Seek the Lord with all of your heart and mind. You will find Him in your everyday circumstances. Your eyes will be opened to new truths. You can experience healing and cleansing. You can drink the Living Water. The Lord can give you security, peace and protection. The Lord has plans for your life and blessings to enjoy.

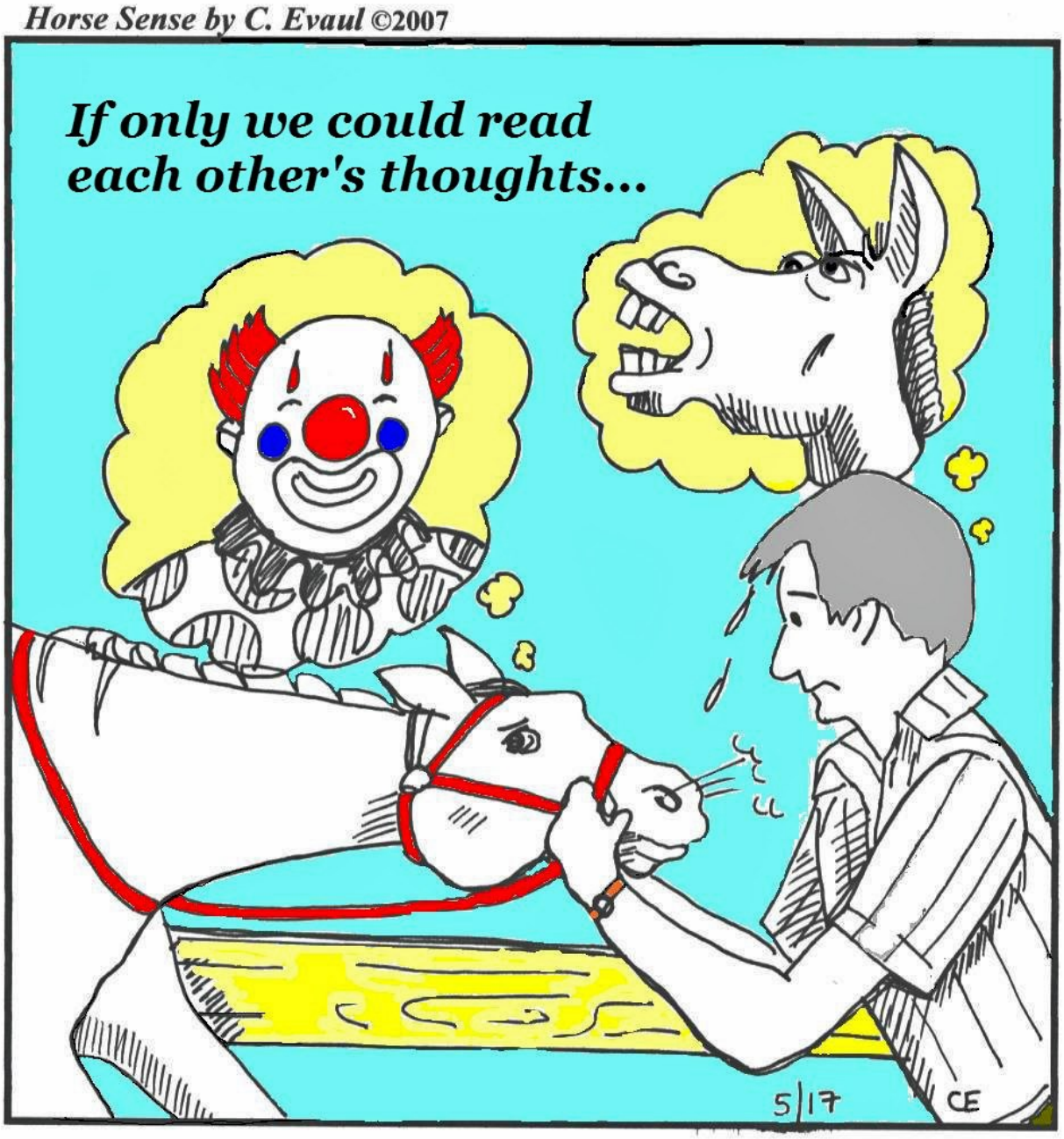
Lastly, I want to close by mentioning that there are still plenty of Mustangs to adopt. There is a lot of information on the Internet. If you are interested in learning more, please contact

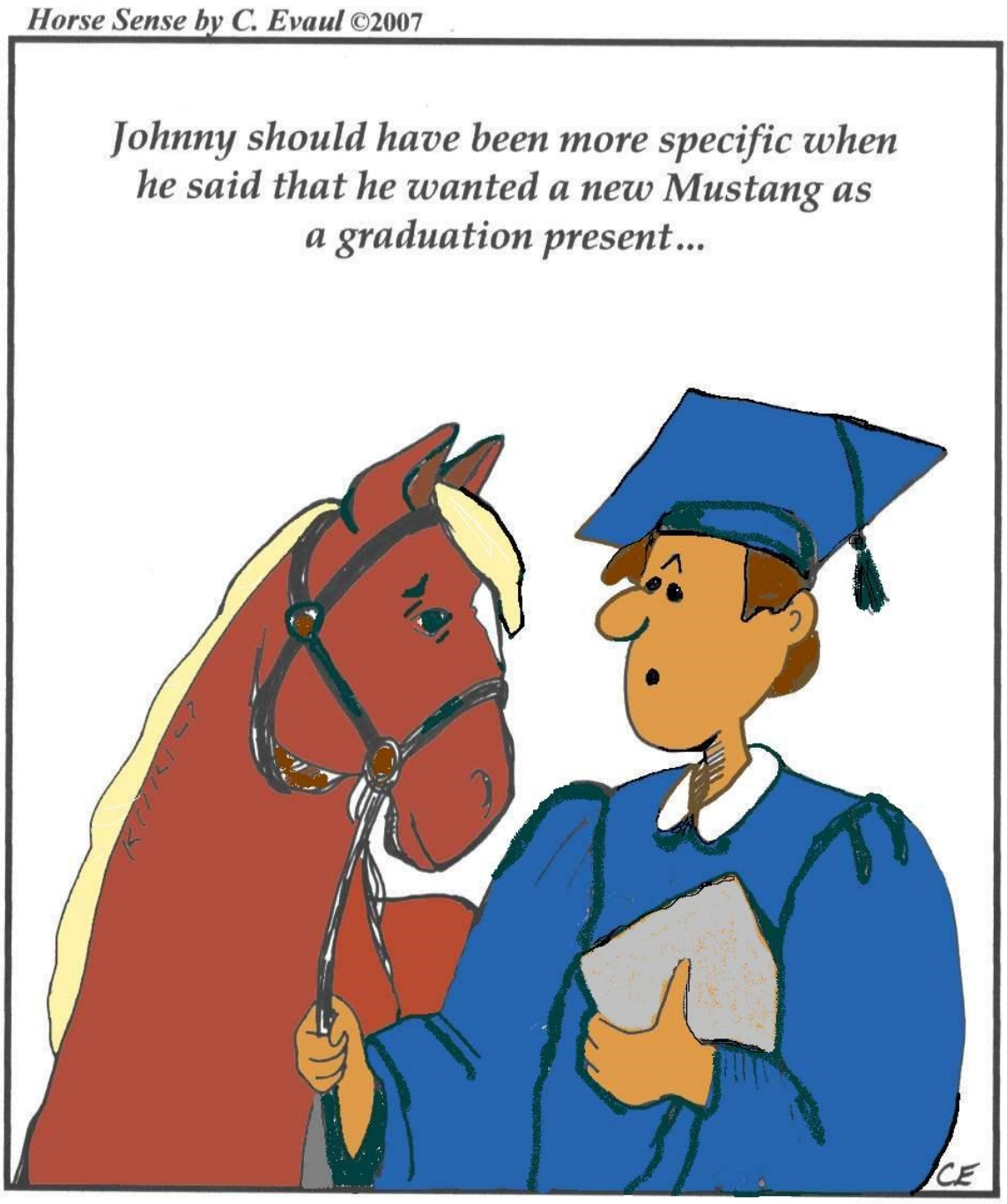
the Bureau of Land Management by visiting their website. You can also find Mustangs in the horse classifieds. While Mustangs are not for everybody, they may help us to improve our skills with horses. They still have special qualities and strengths that may be worth the effort of taming them. Some people may see them as worthless. But hopefully after you have read this, you may have become a better judge of their character. God can help you have your own spiritual adventure. Perhaps you also will discover the joy of adopting Mustangs!

Mustangs are waiting to be adopted. Take your pick of any color or size. They are so beautiful!

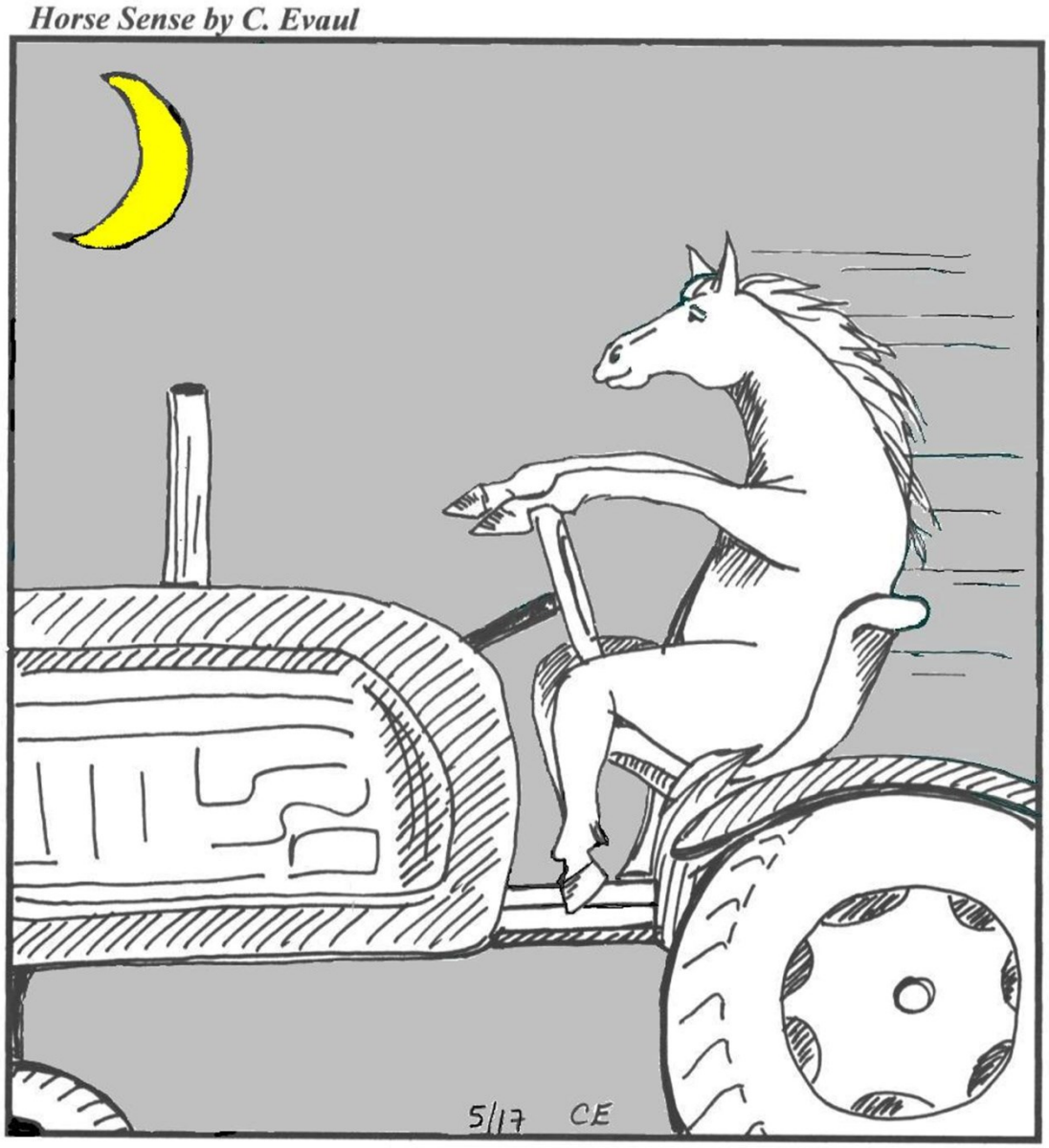
Adopt your own Mustang. Then you can write your own story!

Mustang Cartoons - horsing around...



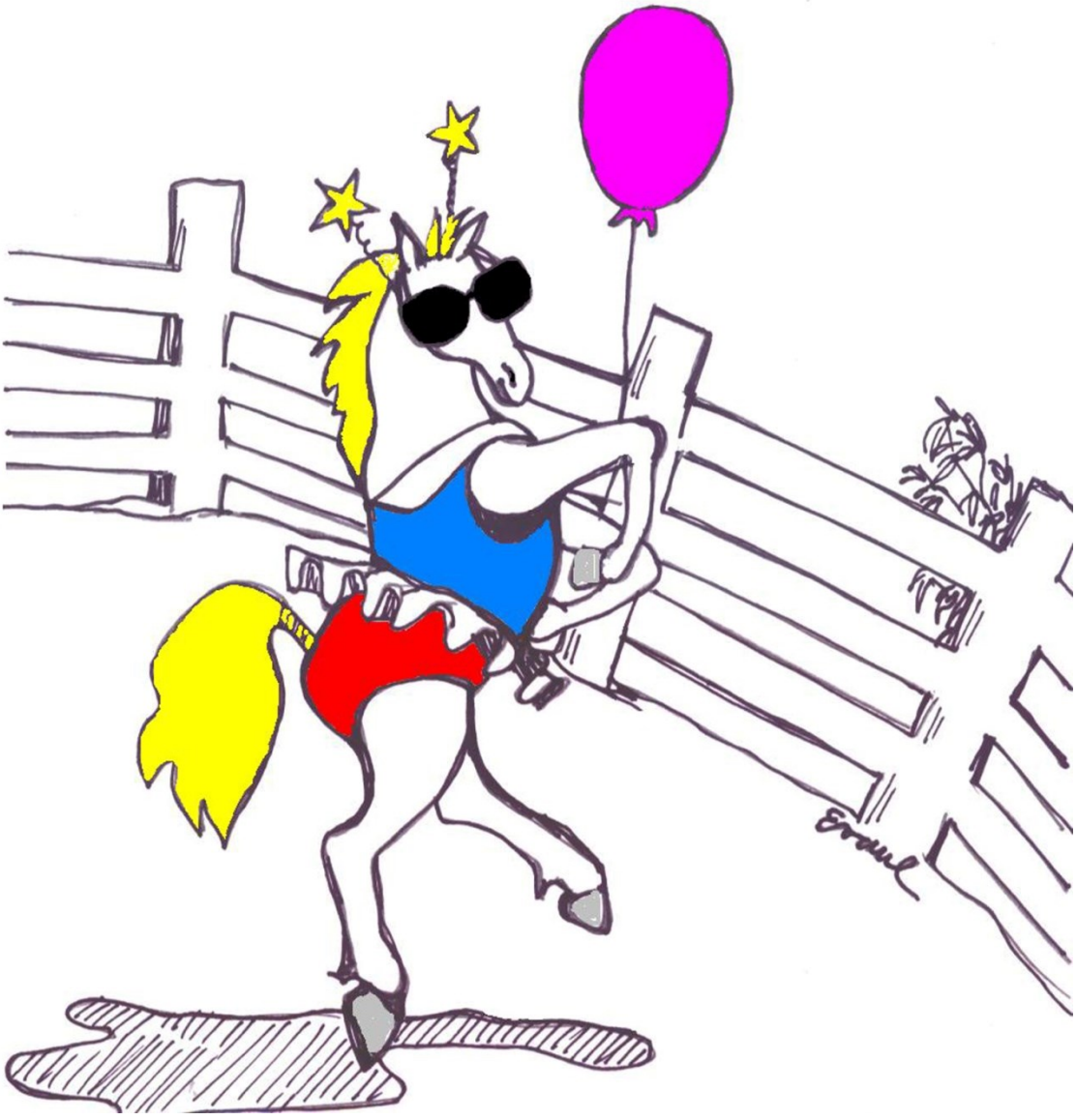

Horse Sense by C. Evaul ©2007
Johnny should have been more specific when he said that he wanted a new Mustang as a graduation present...
CE

YOUR WORST NIGHT "MARE"



WHAT HAPPENS IN THE ROUND PEN,

STAYS IN THE ROUND PEN



EVERYONE WANTS TO BE THE DOMINANT MARE

Epilogue

The three Mustangs were an analogy of three types of walks in the Christian life. Misty never changed although she spent years in the corral with the others. Her fear was intense and she never trusted me. She was not going to be tamed by me. Nelly warmed up to us, but it was a game to her. She teased and played with the idea, but I did not see her giving in. I never got to saddle her or develop a strong connection to her. We sort of made our peace with tolerating each other safely. She was halfway tamed I suppose. She was still a challenge.

Negra was our model horse; she was "in our pocket." I knew she was going to be a great horse. I could do anything to her, she would hold still. She protected me from the other horses. The first time I put a saddle on her, she did nothing. I sat on her and she did not flinch. I would call her over so I could stand on her back to nail the top rail of the fence back on. She was smart and submissive. I hated letting her go. She decided our fences were not going to keep her in, so I had to do something. Eight acres is a lot to fence. Electric fencing did not stop her if she wanted out, she would run through and take the hit. She did stay on our property, like a dog she knew her territory, but it was not wise to allow her to wander. So a decision had to be made.

Reflecting on my experience with the mustangs and the three examples of spiritual trust we develop when we are walking with God. I have used my story to illustrate how we are untamed and even if we are in the corral, we still may not be allowing God to have mastery in our lives.

Do we trust God with our lives? Do we believe that He is good? Do we run from Him or allow Him to get close to us? We may be in the His corral, but quite uncooperative to His will over us. We have to join up to His plan for our life.

God is taking me down another trail now. I will have to trust Him for another "ride." I

believe that He is leading me by faith in this direction, and I will obey. I don't want to be a "Mustang Christian."

I am still open to owning another Mustang one day. I see them in horse ads from time to time. I would like to have one that has been born in captivity or one that is born in my barn. Who knows? I know there are many mistakes I would not repeat now. For example, I would only have one mustang at a time instead of three. Now knowing that they needed space to run, I would have made stronger fences, perhaps using cattle fencing. They need space to run. I don't know if that ever completely leaves them, perhaps that is why they make good trail horses. Anyway, I am still learning myself, so I recognize that they were limited by my abilities.

We can be sure God knows us in a way that is marvelous, as He has "fearfully made us." Such knowledge cannot be understood. He is able to provide the best for us and give us good plans for our future. We need to trust Him and conform to His will. **Jeremiah 29: 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope**. We can hope in His plans!

May God bless you,

Carol Evaul